PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 278

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
20 May—7 June 1996

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20 May 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 278**

TWELFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Monday 20 May 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Theatres

1. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future of locally funded theatres. [28757]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): Government funding in support of local theatres is channelled through the Arts Council and the regional arts boards. The funding of individual theatres is a matter for those bodies, in conjunction with the local authorities and other funding partners.

Mr. Banks: Is there any way in which I may entice the Minister to come along to the Theatre Royal Stratford East in my constituency? He knows that the theatre, which puts on seven new productions a year, has a very ethnically mixed audience, which it is building well, and receives local authority support from the poorest borough in the country. Funding is vital to us, especially since theatres in boroughs around us are closing down. Through which of the four channels could the Theatre Royal apply for lottery money funding of the arts? That is a genuine question, which makes it unusual, and I actually want an answer.

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I would be very interested in accepting the hon. Gentleman's kind invitation and to return to the Theatre Royal in Stratford to see what it is putting on. I need to look at exactly what might be being applied for with regard to the four channels. I know that the local authority is supporting a lottery fund, which will help the theatre and the leisure centre nearby. I shall look at the matter and let the hon. Gentleman know.

Mr. Sykes: If we are in the business of offering invitations, may I invite my hon. Friend to Scarborough—

Mr. Mackinlay: To stay in one of the hotels.

Mr. Sykes: There is nothing wrong with the hotels in Scarborough. I am sure that many hon. Members would rather visit Scarborough than go to Thurrock for their holidays. Would my hon. Friend like to visit the theatre in Scarborough? He will know that it has just opened and that it is a tribute to my constituents. We have just received £1 million-worth of lottery funding, which has helped speed up the process. I assure my hon. Friend that everybody in Scarborough is extremely grateful to the Government for channelling funding in that direction.

Mr. Sproat: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. The theatre is indeed a tribute to the people of Scarborough, but it is also an indication of how successful the lottery has been in channelling money into theatres. I gladly accept his invitation.

Mr. Fisher: Contrary to the Minister's bland, not to say complacent, first answer, underfunding of regional theatres should concern him, the Secretary of State and the Government. Is he aware that regional theatres have accumulated deficits of more than £6 million as a direct consequence, not of bad management or lack of

audiences, but of Government underfunding, especially the Arts Council's cuts in real terms in two of the past three years? What will the Government do about the regional theatres' accumulated deficits, which as the Secretary of State knows, threaten the existence of theatres such as Farnham?

Mr. Sproat: I can give the hon. Gentleman two very direct answers. First, in May last year, the Arts Council produced a green paper on ideas of how funding of regional and other theatres might be improved. As a result, a white paper, as it might be called by the Arts Council, is expected to be published in the summer. We shall study that with great interest. Secondly, a stabilisation fund is being worked out with the Arts Council, precisely to address the type of questions, among others, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Marble Arch

2. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for the refurbishment of Marble Arch; and if she will make a statement. [28758]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The repair and conservation of Marble Arch began on 4 March and is planned for completion by the end of June. The enhancement of our built heritage is based on an active partnership involving my Department, its agencies, sponsored bodies, local authorities and the private sector. I shall be publishing a consultation paper on built heritage later this week.

Mr. Carrington: I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. The appearance of London's historic buildings plays a vital role in making our city beautiful and in attracting tourists. Will she use her powers over the trustees of the Victoria and Albert museum to ensure that, if an extension is built to that museum, it is in accordance with the existing fine and historic character of the buildings?

Mrs. Bottomley: I agree that London's fine buildings are a great attraction to the many tourists who visit the city.

Mr. Tony Banks: What does this have to do with Marble Arch?

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister extended the question. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) was not listening.

Mrs. Bottomley: Investment in many of the major buildings in London has been clearly evident in recent months and years. I suspect that a number of groups will wish to comment on the extension of the V and A, not least the planning authority at Kensington and Chelsea, English Heritage and the Royal Fine Art Commission.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is not the Minister concerned that so many of our ancient and famous buildings are falling into decay as a result of neglect by the Government and related agencies? How does she justify the inordinately long period during which the Albert monument by the Albert hall was under drapes? Have not the Government allowed our capital city to run down and neglected much of our national heritage?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman must be wearing blinkers. Throughout London, an unprecedented number of projects are under way—the Albert memorial restoration, with £8 million to be spent in four years, is but one. There are also plans to carry out further improvements to Parliament square and Trafalgar square, and to introduce pedestrianisation outside Buckingham palace. There are endless examples. The national lottery enables us to do even more to refurbish many of our magnificent buildings, not least the major project to restore the Albert hall.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend's news on Marble Arch is welcome, as is her grasp of so many of the other heritage memorials of London. But what is she doing to hasten the work on Bankside and the refurbishment of the buildings connected with the Royal Festival hall, which are important to London's culture?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will know only too well that lottery awards are enabling the south bank of the Thames to become a veritable cultural centre, as it includes the Globe and Bankside. In addition, parts of Lambeth and Southwark that were in need of investment are now able to take the opportunity to invest in the future and share in a truly great millennium.

Broadcasting Transmission Network

3. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to protect the needs of remoter areas after the privatisation of the broadcasting transmission network. [28759]

Mr. Sproat: Under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990, and the agreement between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the BBC respectively are responsible for establishing and maintaining the standards of coverage, quality and reliability of the four main terrestrial channels. This will not change with the privatisation of the BBC's transmission network.

Mr. Dafis: Nevertheless, is not there concern that the availability of digitised services to remote rural regions is very much in question? Will the Department co-operate with the Department of Trade and Industry to develop an integrated transmissions policy, including matters such as education and multi-media as well as television and radio?

Mr. Sproat: With regard to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he knows that analogue television covers 98.3 per cent. of Wales at the moment, and analogue will not be switched off until a roughly equivalent level of service is provided. The second part of his question was interesting. Although we clearly want an integrated policy, we would also need to involve other Departments, such as the Welsh Office.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that the BBC operates more transmitters in Wales than in the rest of the United Kingdom put together because of the topology of

the Principality? The only way to get the further 1.7 per cent. coverage that the hon. Gentleman so much wants is through digital transmission by satellite. Would my hon. Friend be surprised to learn that Plaid Cymru and the Labour party have opposed the introduction of satellite television as they opposed the introduction of cable television, ITV and Channel 4?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) has not raised those matters in the Committee that is considering the Broadcasting Bill of which he is a distinguished member, but no doubt he will have an opportunity to do so in the coming weeks.

Year of the Pier

4. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her initiative in establishing 1996 as the year of the pier. [28760]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Nineteen ninety-six has been designated as year of the pier by the British Piers Society and the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions. I welcome that initiative. Piers at seaside resorts represent an important part of Britain's built and cultural heritage and a unique element of our national tourism product. I was at the launch of the year of the pier at Brighton a few weeks ago.

Sir Teddy Taylor: While I welcome my right hon. Friend's exciting initiative, will she pursue with Lord Rothschild and Jocelyn Stevens of English Heritage the irrational and unfair policy of denying grants to piers that do not have grade 1 or 2 listed status and that are not located in conservation areas? Would it not be fairer and more in accordance with her excellent policies if they considered every case on its merits rather than trying to create a new bureaucracy through English Heritage?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's comments to Lord Rothschild and Jocelyn Stevens. Several piers have already been supported by English Heritage and by the lottery fund. However, given the success of the heritage lottery fund which has already made 303 awards, it may see scope for extending its remit to incorporate more piers. I very much hope so.

Mr. Olner: I do not know whether a pier is needed in Greenwich for the planned millennium exhibition, but may I advise the right hon. Lady that no pier is required for the national exhibition centre to mount the exhibition? In view of Greenwich's problems, will she seriously consider having the exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham?

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments and I suspect that they would be echoed by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I understand the House's impatience for further definite announcements about the millennium festival. Much work is under way and I hope that it will be possible to make clear announcements before long. I am well aware of the great advantages of the hon. Gentleman's part of the country.

Mr. Waterson: Will my right hon. Friend find time during the year of the pier to visit that pearl of the south coast, Eastbourne pier, which is excellently operated by First Leisure? When she comes, will she also find time to meet local hoteliers and guest house operators to hear their views about the potentially disastrous effects on their businesses of the social chapter and the national minimum wage?

Mrs. Bottomley: I look forward to visiting Eastbourne again and to seeing the Euginius Birch pier which, I believe, was opened in 1872. Like piers around the country it is very much a seaside attraction. I am only sorry that when I visited Worthing pier, which is the only one to have been burnt down, blown up and blown down, I was not then able to visit Eastbourne.

When I meet my hon. Friend's constituents, I expect that I will hear from them about their mounting anxiety at the threat to tourism of Labour's proposals. A minimum wage and its approach to endless regulation and the social chapter are the biggest threat to the tourist industry that the country has known.

Performing Arts

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her Department's policy in respect of the contribution of the performing arts to urban regeneration. [28761]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The performing arts have considerable potential to regenerate urban areas by attracting tourism and inward investment, creating jobs and wealth, and improving the quality of life of local residents.

Mr. Cunningham: Given that answer, what positive plans has the Secretary of State to encourage young people to move away from criminal behaviour? The latest statistics show that 60 per cent. of young people are involved in criminal behaviour in some form. Will she make some positive plans for those young people in the west midlands, and especially in Coventry, where there is a problem in my constituency?

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question because, of all my aims for the Department, it is a priority to encourage youngsters to participate in practical activities, the arts, sport and heritage. That is why we have changed the national lottery rules to enable us to invest in talent and in training and coaching schemes. Only recently, we launched a document entitled, "People Taking Part", which describes the many ways in which different arts organisations have encouraged further participation.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will encourage his local organisations to apply to the lottery distribution bodies for the great benefits that are now available, in addition to the 24 awards—amounting to £2.5 million—that have already been awarded to his part of the world.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend recognise the importance of the performing arts to rural areas as well as urban regeneration, as many people who live in rural areas find it difficult to reach urban areas? I am thinking in

particular of facilities in my constituency such as the cinema, which provides an excellent service and is full of character, and the village halls, where a number of amateur productions take place. They would be extremely grateful for support from the national lottery and other funds. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that even the Labour party now reluctantly admits the great success of the national lottery?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to spell out the needs of rural as well as urban areas and the opportunities that can be provided through the national lottery. He will know that, only recently, the Millennium Commission announced the funding of up to 250 millennium halls to provide a focus for community life that brings people together and provides a great deal of enjoyment.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Secretary of State recognise that the Festival of Britain and not the national lottery brought about the regeneration of the south bank and made it such an exciting magnet to people all over the world who are interested in the arts? It would be a tragedy if the right hon. Lady, presiding over the Millennium Commission, failed to pull off the Greenwich project to regenerate east London. That project—which is to celebrate the millennium—should not depend on private funding.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman recognises the huge regeneration potential of the millennium festival. It involves a great deal of complex planning. He will be reassured to learn that the timetable for decontamination is well under way, although a number of details still have to be addressed. The national lottery enables Britain to fund a celebration that, so far, appears to exceed that planned by any other country.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has announced a ministerial team to support the work of the festival to ensure that, when final decisions are made, Government Departments can respond appropriately and swiftly.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the South Bank centre, including the Royal Festival hall, has made a major contribution to the performing arts in Britain? I know that she is aware that the South Bank centre has proposed an imaginative scheme that not only would improve performing arts at the South Bank centre, but—and perhaps even more crucially—would have a major effect on regeneration of the south bank. As the Royal Festival hall was built at the time of the Festival of Britain in 1951, does she agree that the refurbishment and improvement of the South Bank centre would be a fitting achievement in time for the millennium?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes a strong plea for the merits of the application by the South Bank centre. It is being considered by the Arts Council along with a great number of other projects, many of which are situated in London. The distributing bodies are independent, but they all have to keep a balance between the number of awards they make in London and those serving other parts of the country.

Dr. John Cunningham: Following widespread press reports published before and after the meeting of the Millennium Commission last week, will the Secretary of State tell the House how much private sector funding has been raised for regeneration or investment in connection with the millennium exhibition at Greenwich? Has more time been allocated to the fund-raising process? Have the Government agreed to underwrite the whole project, as some press reports have stated? If so, will the money come from her Department's budget or from the Treasury?

Mrs. Bottomley: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman full information about the discussions that are under way—many of which are confidential. However, I can tell him that the festival committee, which is chaired by Simon Jenkins, has asked Sir Peter Levene to do more urgent work to take forward the encouraging early commitments and understandings reached. We are all aware that it is a complex and exciting proposal that will give the nation an opportunity to celebrate the new millennium in one place while providing a lasting legacy in the form of the significant regeneration of an underdeveloped, but very exciting, part of London. I shall give more information to the House as soon as I am in a position to do so.

Tourism (National Parks)

6. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what support her Department gives to encourage sustainable tourism in national parks. [28762]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am committed to the principle of sustainable tourism. The English tourist board has contributed almost £1 million of pump-priming funding to a number of local sustainable tourism initiatives across the country during the past five years, many of which are located in national parks. The Government have published guidance on sustainable tourism in the national parks.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that we should encourage tourism in our national parks without damaging their magnificent beauty and their natural environments? Will she join me in welcoming the £217,000 grant made available last week by the national lottery sports fund to repair and refurbish some 10,000 m of paths in the Peak district? Does not that demonstrate how the national lottery is not only bringing benefits to tourists but contributing directly to preserving our environment? Will my right hon. Friend take a break from visiting our seaside piers and find an early opportunity to visit the Peak district national park instead?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall certainly take up my hon. Friend's invitation. The Environment Select Committee stressed specifically the positive economic benefits of leisure and tourism in rural areas. It said also that, compared with other activities, tourism and leisure do not cause significant widespread ecological damage to the countryside. My hon. Friend is well aware that efforts must be taken to preserve and protect the natural environment in areas that attract many tourists. Like him, I welcome a further practical contribution from the national lottery.

The Sports Council has made 1,670 awards, and so far it is winning the competition for the number of awards granted. This excellent scheme will protect the countryside and provide facilities for walkers.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Secretary of State aware that one of the most important ways of accessing national parks is via public transport? Would she care to join my family next week when we take the train from Sheffield to Edale in the heart of the Peak district and leave the car at home? Will she ask her colleague the Secretary of State for Transport to stop rail privatisation, which will increase the number of cars entering our national parks?

Mrs. Bottomley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will join me in commending the Millennium Commission which has announced the construction of 2,500 miles of cycleways up and down the country. That will ensure that we have a truly environmentally friendly means of transport in the next century.

National Lottery (Art Galleries)

7. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many art galleries have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [28763]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Art galleries throughout the United Kingdom have benefited from national lottery grants. To date, there have been 34 awards for a total of £74 million, ranging from £50 million to the Tate gallery of modern art at Bankside to £59,865 to the Focal Point gallery in Southend-on-Sea.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for her very encouraging news. Can she confirm that that proves that not only flagship galleries such as the Tate gallery and National gallery benefit from the national lottery, but that dozens of small galleries throughout the country also benefit, I understand, to the tune of £2 million? Can she confirm that there is very much more to come? The decision to make those disbursements is taken by the Museums and Galleries Commission, which is to be congratulated on its excellent work in keeping such marvellous work alive.

Mrs. Bottomley: I share my hon. Friend's commendation of the Museums and Galleries Commission, which is involved in ensuring that standards are maintained and new developments pursued. She is right to say that we want, not only the big battalions, but the small platoons to be funded by the national lottery. That focus on local involvement and participation is the message of our document "People Taking Part", and on the museum side it is very much the message of what is likely to be an extremely successful national museums week this week.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State accept that museums and art galleries such as Towneley hall in Burnley are extremely important to local people? Will she do everything possible to support them and ensure that they continue to receive support from the national lottery, to help them to provide art locally, where it is accessible to people, near where they live?

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes.

School Sport

8. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress she has made in promoting sport in schools. [28764]

Mr. Sproat: My Department, the Department for Education and Employment and the Sports Council are taking forward the initiatives, set out in "Sport: Raising the Game", aimed at promoting sport in schools, and beyond. Full details of progress made will be set out in the follow-up sports policy statement, which will be published in July.

Mr. Brazier: That is extremely welcome news for all those who believe in developing team spirit and character among our young people.

Is my hon. Friend aware, as a particular enthusiast for schoolgirl cricket, of the connection between this question and question No. 12? Does he remember who said:

"At cricket, her kin will lose or win—
She and her maids, on grass and clover,
Eleven maids out—eleven maids in—
And perhaps an occasional 'maiden over!'"?

Mr. Sproat: No. I had either not known or had forgotten the quotation. My hon. Friend is making a tradition of such apposite quotations. I can tell him, however, that I am all in favour of girls playing cricket at school. If the England men's cricket team were as good as the England girls' cricket team, it might do much better.

Mr. Pendry: Is the Minister aware that he has just given a complacent reply to a very complacent question? Is he further aware that Conservative Governments have allowed school sport to decline to an unprecedented level during the past 17 years, overseeing the flogging off of 5,000 playing fields, halving the number of physical education teachers and presiding over a fall of three quarters in the number of extra-curricular sporting fixtures?

On the latter point, the Minister will be aware of the understandable statement made by the National Union of Teachers today threatening a complete boycott by its members of participation in out-of-hours school sport until adequate insurance provision is in place, following a recent court decision against a rugby referee over damages. Will he therefore be more proactive than his counterpart in the Department for Education and Employment, and call together all interested parties as swiftly as possible in an attempt to resolve that worrying situation, described as a grey area by an education spokesman today? Otherwise, the objectives of "Sport: Raising the Game" to increase participation in sport in schools will be merely a pipe-dream.

Mr. Sproat: On the hon. Gentleman's point about insurance, the situation is serious, and I did read with great interest what the National Union of Teachers spokesman said.

I understand that it is the duty of school governors to take out insurance to cover teachers. That may set minds at rest regarding some problems that beset teachers, but it does not cover the overall problem of the risks of sport in

schools, which we shall consider closely. We shall have a chance to return to that and other matters when we have a sports debate on Friday 7 June.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Does my hon. Friend accept that cricket poses particular problems for schools because it takes longer to play than other sports and because school transport arrangements often conflict with the needs of those taking part? Will the Government look for innovative ideas and do everything possible to revive cricket in our schools?

Mr. Sproat: The lottery can now allocate money to provide transport for schools, as long as it is available to the community as well as to the schools. In addition, under new criteria, every physical education teacher will be required to be equipped to take competitive team games, including one mainstream winter game and one mainstream summer game—and that definitely includes cricket.

Broadcasting (Equal Opportunities)

10. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to promote equal opportunities for employees of broadcasters awarded licences under the Broadcasting Bill. [28766]

Mr. Sproat: Under the Broadcasting Bill, licences issued to television multiplex providers and broadcasters and to national radio multiplex providers and broadcasters will include conditions to promote equal opportunities for all employees and fair treatment for disabled persons. The conditions will be enforced by the Independent Television Commission. All licence holders will be subject to general equal opportunities legislation.

Mrs. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that no body has an obligation to promote equal opportunities among the independent programme producers? Does he consider it satisfactory that 10 of the 16 channel 3 licensees have no female staff at board level, and that four of those have no women at senior management level either?

Mr. Sproat: No, I am not aware of the statistics just given by the hon. Lady. I can, however, inform the hon. Lady that, in Carlton, GMTV and Channel 4, the majority of employees are women. As the hon. Lady will know from our debates on the Broadcasting Bill, the number of women is increasing in other areas as well—and I hope that that continues.

Ballet and Opera

11. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for making lottery funding available for the development of expertise in ballet and opera. [28767]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Support to students of dance and drama is administered through discretionary grants by local authorities under the overall responsibility of the Department for Education and Employment. I share the concern of many hon. Members about the availability of such grants. On 1 April, I announced changes to the lottery rules requiring the Arts Council to take account of the need to develop the skills, talents and creative abilities of young people. The council is now considering how to implement the new direction, and it must do so in a way that does not substitute for existing public expenditure.

Mr. Gunnell: I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that that is not satisfactory. I am sure that she will confirm that the Arts Council is not able to make grants for dance students, for drama students and for opera students at the national opera studio. The students are not allowed to apply for national lottery funding, so they must approach local authorities. I am sure that the Secretary of State will confirm that fewer and fewer local authorities are able to fund discretionary awards in these areas—in fact, many have stopped doing so—so many students from many areas will not receive funding for training in dance, drama or opera. There is an urgent need to find a way for such grants to proceed. The experts in these disciplines provide a great deal of income for the country through their performances abroad. I believe that we should continue to make expertise available.

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. His part of the country has received lottery awards for significant arts projects, including three for dance. He will know that the number of mandatory grants for dance and drama has increased as the number of degree courses has increased. However, the degree to which local authorities fund discretionary awards is up to them. The hon. Gentleman will welcome, as I do, last week's announcement by the Arts Council that it has asked the chairman of the London arts board, Clive Priestly, to look at this area to see whether further steps can be taken and whether the new Arts Council lottery direction that I announced recently can be used to good effect.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is it not ironic that, when the success of the national lottery is offering hundreds of millions of pounds of extra support for charities, sport and the arts, the D'Oyly Carte Company—the principal custodian of the unique British tradition of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas—receives only £18,000 a year in public funds? Will my right hon. Friend take urgent action, either by issuing new directions on stabilisation funding or by other means, to avert the closure of that company—its current season ends this week, and its autumn season has been cancelled—so as to ensure the survival of this much-loved tradition for our generation and generations to come?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members in his strong support for the D'Oyly Carte. A number of plans are under way, and I think that the Arts Council is now well aware of the strength of feeling on this matter. A moment ago, my hon. Friend the Minister of State outlined the development in stabilisation funds—another way in which we are trying to make the lottery more flexible so as to deal with some of the longer-term needs of arts organisations. We have listened to the concern that capital grants alone may not be sufficient to perform the task. We believe that greater flexibility will mean that more arts organisations will have a more flourishing future.

Mr. Jamieson: Does the Secretary of State recall the correspondence between her Department and me about Natasha Cornish, a very talented young dancer in my

constituency, who was advised to contact the Arts Council with a view to receiving grant aid? As the Secretary of State's Department has directed the Arts Council that it should not undertake any long-term funding, how will the Arts Council fund students during two to three-year periods? Does she agree that we must iron out this anomaly if we are to help some of our brightest and best young dancers?

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do not regard two or three years as long-term funding. It is perfectly possible for the Arts Council, with the changed direction that we have announced for it, to address that issue. Such funding formally remains the responsibility of local authorities, through discretionary grants, and it is for them to decide what priority to give such awards. Clive Priestly intends to report to the chairman of the Arts Council precisely to deal with that interface. It will be a very timely report, and I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments to Mr. Priestly.

Light Opera

12. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to fund touring productions of light opera in provincial towns in Britain. [28768]

Mr. Sproat: Specific arts funding decisions are, of course, taken at arm's length from the Government by the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards. Ministers will consider shortly the Arts Council's proposals to use lottery funds to support the financial stabilisation of some arts companies. The Arts Council's chairman, Lord Gowrie, has recently written to me suggesting that D'Oyly Carte might be part of an associated pilot project.

Mr. Steen: The problem is with the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear."] Wait a moment. The D'Oyly Carte has been in touch with the Arts Council for three years, asking for some money. All that it gets from the Government is 10 per cent. of its running costs, whereas grand opera gets 90 per cent. of its running costs. Are the Government going to allow one of the great and most cherished institutions in the country to collapse when there is £300 million of Arts Council money in the lottery that is not being used? It is the Secretary of State's problem—it has nothing to do with the Arts Council.

Mr. Sproat: The House will be pleased to know that, since our most recent Question Time—after the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier)—I wrote to the chairman of the Arts Council, who wrote back. The Arts Council will now investigate whether the stabilisation fund can be applied to D'Oyly Carte as part of a pilot project. The Government are of course acutely aware of the great value of D'Oyly Carte and of the entire Gilbert and Sullivan canon. The Arts Council provides those moneys. The Government have no money with which they directly fund organisations, whether D'Oyly Carte or any other, but I hope that the Arts Council will do what the great majority of hon. Members and the country want it to do.

Rugby Football (Wales)

13. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to encourage rugby football in Wales. [28769]

Mr. Sproat: Government responsibility for sport in Wales rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. Central Government funding for sport in Wales is channelled through the Sports Council for Wales.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important to ensure that young people in Wales have the opportunity at school and outside school to play competitive sports such as rugby and soccer? Will he confirm that he will co-operate fully with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to ensure that such opportunities are made available?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I will. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales produced a Welsh document that was the equivalent of "Raising the Game", in which he placed similar emphasis on the importance of competitive games at school. Rugby has received about £235,000 in Wales from Sportsmatch, and another £1.3 million from the lottery. Rugby is doing pretty well in the context of sport in Wales. When Wales has a few rugby league players playing for it again, it might do even better.

Mr. Barry Jones: Would the Minister and the Secretary of State like to congratulate Buckleigh primary school in my constituency, which reached the finals of its district rugby union competition recently, and to which I had the honour of presenting some awards? Will the Minister consider visiting the school and, in so doing, take into account especially the cost of kit? The necessary sportswear is expensive. If there is unemployment and difficulty in an area, the problems are even greater. Will the Minister comment on that?

Mr. Sproat: Certainly. I congratulate Buckleigh primary school. It is one of the prime aims of "Raising the Game" that exactly what the hon. Gentleman has described happens. The provision of kit is a difficult problem for many schools. The Sports Council will agree to help fund schemes where schools are linked to local clubs. The provision of kit could be part of such a deal. If the hon. Gentleman would like to get in touch with me, I shall make him aware of the details of the scheme.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

27. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the categories of recipients of legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [28787]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I have received many representations recently at local level.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the case of a young Old Etonian who obtained legal aid to challenge the terms of his great uncle's £50 million will, only to lose the action? Is he aware also of other cases where poor people cannot obtain legal aid? Sometimes, people obtain legal aid to bring actions against those who cannot afford to proceed as a result of the other side having unlimited legal aid. Does not the system require examination? What are the Government doing to achieve that?

Mr. Evans: I cannot comment on individual decisions, but I can comment on general policy. A means test operates in the grant of legal aid, and that should apply in each case. Cases are drawn to the attention of the Government from time to time of people who are apparently wealthy being granted legal aid. Against that background, I replied some months ago to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). I stated that the Government had decided to bring forward specific measures to deal with the difficulties to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) referred. Regulations will come into force on 1 June.

Mr. Skinner: How can the Government justify handing out large sums to seemingly wealthy people such as the Maxwells and various others who have been involved in fraud on a massive scale, whereas a young lad in my constituency, Neil Edwards, who went to work for a fellow who had a sawmill at Clumber park near Worksop—the employer was not insured and young Neil lost a number of fingers and tried to claim benefit as a result of disablement—was refused legal aid on the basis that his employer had not been properly insured for himself or those who worked for him? Those who represented the legal aid scheme said that there was no guarantee that they could get any money out of the employer, even though he had been a small business man for several years. It is a scandal that a young lad can lose fingers yet receive no legal aid while big nobs can get as much as they like.

Mr. Evans: It is essential that individual decisions on the granting of legal aid are seen to be free of both Government and political interference. There is, therefore, a set means test, which applies to all cases, that it is administered by the Legal Aid Board. The hon. Gentleman is referring to two other tests administered by the board—the test of the legal merits of individual cases and the reasonableness test. Those tests also must be seen to be free of Government and political interference.

Census Returns

28. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make the census returns available to searchers at a central London location following the closure of the Chancery lane public record office. [28788]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Public Record Office is negotiating an alternative central London location at which it will make the census returns available to searchers, following the closure of its Chancery lane building.

Mr. Lidington: Despite the welcome investment by the Government in new buildings and information technology at the PRO at Kew, which I had the privilege of visiting this morning, may I impress on my hon. Friend the fact that many thousands of people use the census return search rooms at Chancery lane each year and that it is of great importance to them that the Government treat the need for an alternative search centre with urgency and provide it as soon as the Chancery lane office closes?

Mr. Evans: I am pleased that my hon. Friend was impressed by the facilities that he saw at Kew. Most of the people who have had the opportunity to view the facilities share his enthusiasm for them. He is right that the census returns from 1841 to 1891 attract much public interest and, in 1994-95, some 80,000 individual reader visits were paid to the central London location of the Public Record Office. The Government are determined to ensure that an alternative central London location is made available to enable people to continue to have access to records.

Legal Aid

29. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his policy in providing legal aid in matrimonial cases when one party is domiciled outside the EC. [28789]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The same statutory tests of means and merits apply to all legal aid applicants, regardless of domicile. Provided that an applicant meets those tests, legal aid is available for most matrimonial proceedings, other than most undefended divorce petitions conducted before the courts of England and Wales.

Mr. Steen: What can be the justification for offering legal aid to fathers who abandon their wives and children and go abroad, having never given their children or wives a penny piece in maintenance? Those fathers not only demand legal aid, but receive it wherever they live in the world. Our taxpayers are paying for fathers who have abandoned, and refuse to look after, their wives and children. Does my hon. Friend support that?

Mr. Evans: The general view that has been taken is that, if tests of means, legal merits and reasonableness are satisfied, legal aid should be available for proceedings before our courts. As part of the review of legal aid for the apparently wealthy, the Lord Chancellor considered issues such as the nationality of applicants. On that occasion, the majority of responses received by the Lord Chancellor asked for the system to remain as it is, which is why he announced last year that the structure would remain unchanged.

Mr. Olner: The Lord Chancellor must know that, in cases such as that which the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has just raised, legal aid is available for anyone who comes here and invokes The Hague convention, especially in cases of child abduction. Legal aid is not available for our citizens when they go abroad for the same purpose. It is time that the Government looked into that important area of equality.

Mr. Evans: I have said that the issue of nationality has been examined, but the question that the hon. Gentleman raises turns on the availability of legal aid in other jurisdictions. Some legal aid is available through some countries, but I share his concern about the specific cases that he has raised with me in meetings recently. If we are able to assist, the hon. Gentleman knows that my door is open and that I shall endeavour to be of assistance.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend will be aware that, in the recent Sony case, legal aid of £500,000 was given to a German who had paid no taxes in this country. Is not it scandalous that individuals who live abroad, pay no United Kingdom taxes and never intend to pay any United Kingdom taxes should be eligible for legal aid in this country?

Mr. Evans: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns but, as I have said, the matter was the subject of a review by the Lord Chancellor last year, and the vast majority of respondents felt that legal aid should continue to be available. However, as my hon. Friend well knows, I share his concern about the wider issue—the availability of legal aid to people who appear to be wealthy, and appear to be beyond the means test. The changes that will begin to operate on 1 June will, I think, prove helpful in the effort to deal with some of the cases that have come to public attention.

Trials

30. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will review (a) the wearing of wigs and (b) the use of the dock in trials. [28791]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The wearing of wigs in trials was considered through consultation papers in 1992 and 1994. The use of the dock in trials was considered by the royal commission on criminal justice in 1993. I have no plans to order a further review of either issue.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is the Minister aware that the wearing of wigs in court, particularly by judges, not only makes judges look ridiculous but intimidates the accused? Is it not time that we ceased to take the advice of the judiciary in this regard? Should not common sense prevail? Should we not at least give people the option of not wearing absurd Jacobean garb?

As for the use of the dock, the person in the dock feels intimidated and that the case is prejudicial. In a modern society and judicial system, an accused person who has not been found guilty should not feel intimidated and isolated. Is that not prejudicial to good justice?

Mr. Evans: I note the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the wearing of wigs in court, but—

Mr. Mackinlay: Madam Speaker does not wear a wig.

Mr. Evans: Indeed, but I shall not be drawn into that line of argument.

In August 1992, the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice issued a joint consultation paper on the issue. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's view is shared by a limited number of people: the vast majority of respondents felt that court dress should remain the same.

As for the wider issue of the use of the dock, the royal commission on criminal justice considered it in 1993—

Mr. Mackinlay: All lawyers.

Mr. Evans: With respect, the commission considered the issue in the context of the security of the courtroom. Its decision not to do away with the dock was based on concerns about security—not only keeping the prisoner in secure conditions, but in terms of the prisoner's protection in the court.

Mr. Ashby: Is my hon. Friend aware that, during the consultation by the Bar Council that he mentioned, defendants were consulted, and said almost to a man that they wanted their briefs to be properly tarted up for their day in court?

Mr. Evans: I bow to my hon. Friend's greater knowledge of these matters.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Is this follicularly challenged Minister aware that many of us, who have worn wigs in court for many years and seen our fine shocks of hair diminished by their wearing properties, would gladly get rid of them? Will he bear it in mind, however, that, as has just been said, convicted prisoners—those who have been found guilty despite being defended by the bewigged—still feel that they are represented better by someone in a wig than by a bald man without a wig?

Mr. Evans: During my time in practice in the magistrates courts of south Wales, no such observation was made to me.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend use the time that he is wisely not going to waste on this issue to pursue the earlier issue of legal aid? We are not at all satisfied with the answers that we have received this afternoon.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend may be aware that the Lord Chancellor has been engaged in wide-ranging consultations about the future structure of legal aid. I reassure my hon. Friend that the Lord Chancellor intends shortly to announce in the Green Paper "Targeting Need" his proposals for taking forward the arrangements that were the subject of consultation.

Mr. Boateng: If barristers are to continue to be allowed to wear wigs in court, does the Minister think it fair that solicitor advocates should enjoy the same, perhaps rather dubious, privilege?

Mr. Evans: I do not know whether that question is asked on the basis of the hon. Gentleman's personal experience—he has chosen to leave the solicitors' profession and to join the Bar. The use of wigs by solicitor advocates was considered in 1994, and the general judgment was that there should be no compulsion on solicitors to wear them.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

AGRICULTURAL PRICE PROPOSALS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5215/96, relating to agricultural prices for 1996–97 and related measures, and the Unnumbered Explanatory Memorandums submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 3rd May 1996 on supplementary premium payable to sheep producers in non-Less Favoured Areas of Ireland and the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate an outcome on the price proposals which takes account of the interests of UK producers, consumers and taxpayers alike, and to seek an outcome on the supplementary premium proposal which is affordable, non-discriminatory in the island of Ireland and does not disadvantage other EU sheep producers.

FRAUDS AND IRREGULARITIES

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4512/96 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 7th May 1996, relating to on-the-spot checks and inspections by the Commission for the detection of frauds and irregularities, accepts the need for stronger Commission powers to fight fraud throughout the Community and supports the Government's aim to ensure that such powers are not open to abuse.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Reserve Forces Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR GENERAL RESERVE FORCES AND CADETS

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint a senior reservist officer, to hold a rank not less than Major General, or RN/RAF equivalent, who shall have served for not less than ten years in the volunteer reserves and who shall be known as the "Director General Reserve Forces and Cadets".

(2) The purpose of this post shall be to provide Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff with advice on policy matters relating to the reserve forces and cadets and to co–ordinate with other agencies and bodies to promote the health and well–being of the reserve forces.

(3) The principal roles of the Director General Reserve Forces and Cadets shall be—

(a) to support the Ministry of Defence in policy advice on mobilisation strategy as it impacts on the civilian community and on the terms and conditions of reservists;

(b) to provide input on all aspects of Ministry of Defence policy which affect the reserve forces, including training organisation and deployment, drawing on expertise from the civilian community;

(c) to liaise with the Department for Health, in conjunction with the senior reservist medical officers, on matters relating to civilian employment of reservist medical personnel;

(d) to liaise with the Department of Transport and the aviation industry, in collaboration with senior reservist aviation officers from all three services, on matters relating to aviation and reserve force service;

(e) in collaboration with the National Employers' Liaison Committee to seek to ensure that arrangements for reservist service are made as attractive as possible for civilian employers; this should include designing reporting systems on serving individuals, where they wish, for the benefit of their employers;

(f) to work with university military education committees and officer training corps both to promote officer recruiting into the reserve forces and to ensure that the structure of officer training is attractive to universities and receives academic recognition where possible;

(g) to liaise with schools and youth organisations on ways of promoting and enhancing the roles of cadet forces; to take a particular interest in the recruiting of officers and senior non–commissioned officers for the cadet forces;

(h) to work with the council of Territorial and Volunteer Reserve Associations on all aspects of recruiting and manning;

(i) to liaise closely with the single service Inspector Generals; and

(j) to liaise closely with the reserve forces of other English speaking and other European countries to examine initiatives abroad to improve recruiting and retention, with particular emphasis on initiatives in the civilian community affecting employers, reservist families and the wider civilian environment.

(4) The Director General shall be provided with a regular Brigadier or RN/RAF equivalent (in the first place the present Director Reserves and Cadets) to act as his chief of staff and to assist him in his duties.'.—*[Mr. Brazier.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.30 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I regret that my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) is ill in Scotland and cannot be here to speak.

I have supported the Bill all the way and I have been impressed by the way in which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who I am glad to see on the Front Bench, has handled it. Essentially, the Bill sets up a welcome legal framework for the use of reserves. The new clause goes to the heart of wider issues which many of us feel cause the reserve forces serious difficulties, and it reflects the frustration that is felt by many middle-ranking reserve officers over the current arrangements for reserve forces.

By establishing a reservist as the director general of reserves and cadets, the new clause seeks to establish a framework for policy on the management of the reserve forces and the cadet forces which does not in any way interfere with the command structure.

The Select Committee on Defence has presented an excellent report which outlines in some detail some of the sad difficulties to which I have alluded about the reserve forces. The new clause is extremely relevant to those difficulties. I shall mention a historic one before looking forward to illustrate exactly why we need reservist advice in the centre. The Select Committee on Defence asked why a battalion was down-roled from the best-recruited infantry regiment in the Territorial Army when many units which were poorly recruited and which in one or two cases were almost completely ineffective were being kept. The answer from the Regular officer concerned was that the change was required to achieve symmetry with the regimental pattern in the Regular Army, whatever that piece of gobbledegook means. If there had been proper reservist advice from the centre I do not think that that mistake would have been made. The Select Committee report points to the poverty of officer training in our reserve forces, especially in relation to that in the new world countries of Canada, America and Australia.

The most important quote in the report states:

"Assuming that suitable candidates can be identified, we recommend that the Government should give serious consideration to appointing a Reservist as the next Director General of Reserves."

It was with disbelief that I heard that, far from appointing a reservist, it is intended to abolish the post altogether.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My hon. Friend speaks about the excellent training in Canada for reserve forces. I confirm that. My son was in their reserves for many years and they were eligible for the Gulf war. They are exceedingly well-trained throughout Canada.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend is right. On my last visit to Canada, I found exactly the same. The fact that the Canadian director general of reserves is an academic explains why Canada has built a close link with schools and universities in Canada, a link that is conspicuously missing here.

Exactly the same problems exist in all parts of the English-speaking world. We find long faces among many reservists in all the countries that I have mentioned. Fragmentation of working patterns makes it much harder to reach employers. There is also the breakdown of the family and of the community, and the decline in the volunteer ethos. The fundamental difference, however, between Britain and America, Canada and Australia is that all those other countries, with reservist advice in the centre, have been much more successful at devising programmes—many of them entirely cost-free programmes—to tackle those problems, instead of just complaining about them. Those programmes are illustrated on the amendment paper.

The director general's duties, which I have outlined in the amendment paper, are based on those of the current Canadian director general of reserves, with ideas also from Australia, America, the Select Committee and territorials here.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that not just people abroad, but many people here—myself included as a reservist—feel that much can be done as a result of this initiative? Many people in this country would like to give information to help to ensure that the voice of the reserves is properly represented at the centre.

Mr. Brazier: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He is the only serving reservist in the House. As such, he is someone whom we should—*[Interruption.]* I apologise. I understand that we have a second. I look forward to hearing the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) as well. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) serves twice a month with the Royal Air Force reserves.

I shall mention just a few of my suggestions for the duties that such a director general could have. He could give advice on mobilisation issues. It is fine to have machinery in place and I approve of the machinery in the Bill, but anyone who has been involved in mobilisation—not just here, but in Canada and America, where they have done much more of it in the past few years—will say that it is vital to tackle a million tiny details when people are pulled out of a civilian working environment. Reservist advice in the centre is essential in that.

It is important to liaise with the Department for Health. We have an excellent Secretary of State for Health who is an ex-reservist. His deputy is married to a member of the medical reserves. It is a great shame that no delegation has gone to see them to discuss the problems in civilian life which serving reservists sometimes suffer in relation to trust hospitals.

We could do so much more with the aviation industry. Two thirds of America's tactical strategic airlift is run by reservists. We need an initiative led not by the RAF, for which I have the greatest respect, but by a prominent civilian figure from the aviation industry, backed by reservists, to persuade the industry that much more could be done to build a proper air reserve in this country, thus releasing funds for equipment: reservist manpower costs are so much lower.

I mention also the importance of the relationship with employers and with the National Employers Liaison Committee. We built that in successful imitation of the model abroad, but Canada and Australia—and the Canadians have kindly just sent me an example—have a package of standard letters for units on how an individual unit can build a relationship with employers.

[Mr. Brazier]

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman) referred to her son's experience in Canada. The university regiments in Canada and Australia are fundamental to officer recruiting. One enterprising commanding officer told me last year that he had written to every officer training corps in the country to ask them if any of their output of cadets were coming to his regimental area. I am glad that we are at last introducing a system of automatic notification. Yet such a system has existed in all these other countries for many years—in one case, since before the war.

We need reservist policy advice at the centre. The reserve forces are full of people who know what needs doing; we cannot expect the Regular Army to advise on the same policy matters.

Last but by no means least on my list is the important relationship with cadet forces. General Colin Powell, in his marvellous testimony to his experience in the American armed forces, has described the vital change in his life made by one enthusiastic cadet instructor. To make the cadet forces really work well and to give them an exciting future, as the national service generation that used to provide so many instructors disappears, we need people with a foothold in civilian life. We need people who can reach out to the teaching profession and to many other organisations; it is from their ranks that these instructors must come. A reservist is responsible for this activity in Canada and Australia.

I know that the Minister will have been given a great many arguments by the Regular forces, especially the Regular Army, as to why all this is nonsense and why reservists should not fill senior positions. At this point it may be relevant to mention a submission that General Fay made to the Australian inquiry into the reserve forces. It was a successful submission, in that most of his ideas were adopted. He accepted all the difficulties involved in putting reservists in senior positions in a complicated modern military world, but his final comment was:

"Failure to provide for senior . . . reserve officer career progression would result in an inability to attract high calibre personnel into the officer ranks. The impact of such a failure in any organisation is self-evident."

Our Select Committee concluded that that was one of the key reasons for the weaknesses in our reserve forces officer corps.

Although we have a minority of excellent units, I find it deeply worrying that we have the worst turnover rate in the English-speaking world. The Army Personnel Research Establishment research into the attitudes of territorials leaving the forces lists boring training and poor officer leadership as important factors, according to the Select Committee's report.

The Australian paper that I have already mentioned ended with a remarkable quotation from Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey, uttered in 1932. He was the only Australian ever to reach the rank of Field Marshal and was himself originally a reservist. He said:

"If the enthusiasm and sacrifice of time and study of this group of keen officers . . . is allowed to die out, neither money nor the volunteering of large numbers of gallant but untrained men will enable an effective Army to suddenly be created in a crisis."

During the last war the Australians had no Regular framework in the sense that we had one. The British Regular Army and Regular armed forces are second to none, and have been second to none throughout this century, but when it comes to citizen forces—despite a number of exceptionally gallant reserve units—we can learn much from our brethren in the new world and the Antipodes.

The Australians listened to Field Marshal Blamey. Rommel testified that the finest troops sent against the Germans in the desert campaign were Australians and New Zealanders. The cat was let out of the bag when Monty's chief of staff, General Freddy de Guingard, commented in 1944, during the attempt to break out after D-day: "The old man is absolutely furious. He's cursing the fact that we don't have the Australian ninth division here to lead the way out."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said earlier, these views are not confined to Australia, Canada and America. I should like to quote one voice from Britain, Colonel Tony Sellon. He asked me to stress that he was speaking in a personal capacity, not as chairman of the Greater London Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve. Still, he is the man who, as we all know, led the campaign to save the TA in the last round of defence cuts when others should have been doing that job. He is the man who organised the dinner at London Scottish which 70 of us attended and where this message came across strongly. Recently, he also organised the letter-writing campaign about the Royal Marine reserves. He said:

"My personal view is that it is extraordinary that a service organisation comprised of over 60,000 members, which is approximately one third of the Army's total strength, some of whom hold responsible positions in industry, commerce and in academia, is effectively precluded from filling its own top slot . . . In the same way that policy matters in the Board Room can often best be addressed by the non-executive Directors, so too is the right part-timer best placed to advise on policy matters relating to the Reserve Forces. It works well in other countries and in business and commerce; so too would it work here."

The opportunities from the use of our reserve forces are limitless. In America, more than half of all manpower, excluding regular reservists, is provided by reservists. If they are used regularly—90,000 of them went to the Gulf—so much more money can be spent on equipment because reservists are so much cheaper. Here, less than a fifth of our manpower comprises reservists. If the purpose behind the Bill is to become a reality, and we are to go beyond a few hundred people deployed to Bosnia and achieve the standards that we want in reservists, we must cut the crippling wastage and find out why such wastage is so much lower in all the countries that I have mentioned.

I end by looking back two centuries to 1757, when a certain ambitious, extremely able and gallant militia colonel approached the War Office to ask whether he could be transferred from the militia to the regular forces since he could not rise beyond the rank of colonel in the militia. Had the War Office of the day had an enlightened Minister like my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and not told him that, in spite of his gallant role under Wolfe it had no more use for him, the young Colonel Washington might have taken a different view of this country and history might have taken a different course.

We have 60,000 British reservists. They deserve a better voice in government than a single brigadier in Wilton. It is time that, like our English-speaking counterparts, we had a reservist general to advise Ministers and chiefs of staff in the Ministry of Defence.

3.45 pm

Mr. Mans: I very much support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). I genuinely feel that the reserve and Regular forces are moving into a new era, in which reservists will be more important to the defence of this country. That needs to be recognised in a way that will enhance the reserve forces, encourage recruitment and ensure that they can play a more worthwhile part in Britain's defence.

I strongly believe that the new clause in no way threatens the way in which the Regular forces operate. It is absolutely right that we must ensure that our armed forces speak with one voice. The new clause will not affect the Regular armed forces—notably the chief of the general staff—being able to speak for everybody, reservists and Regulars. Without the enhancement of the status of reservists, we will find it difficult to continue to recruit the calibre of men and women that we need.

We will also find it difficult to ensure that the particular needs and problems that reservists have in filling two roles will be appreciated at the top. Above all, whatever the outcome of this debate, it is important that the voice of reservists is heard fully and at the top of Whitehall. If we can achieve that, regardless of whether the new clause is accepted, the debate will have been worth while.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the chance to speak briefly in support of the new clause moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), and to support the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). I am enthusiastic about the clause for the reason that has just been given—it will help to enhance the work of our reserves and our cadets. I speak with experience, as someone who spent a total of 24 years either with the reserves or with the cadets.

It must be right to spend more time debating this subject. After all, we are talking about young people and people who want to serve their country—a positive achievement. We spend far too much time in the House talking about complex regulations that are not understood by people outside. In this case, however, we are talking about the way in which people can volunteer to serve this country with the reserves or the cadets. We are also talking about people who give up their time to volunteer to be officers in the reserves and leaders of the cadets. This is not a party-political matter, but it is a pity that we do not spend more time talking about such people and their achievements. This country would be far better if we saw more in the newspapers and elsewhere about the achievements of our reserves.

I want to make two other remarks before I sit down. First, the new clause states that the senior reservist who is to become the director general of reserve forces and cadets will

"liaise with schools and youth organisations on ways of promoting and enhancing the roles of cadet forces"

and will take a particular interest in recruiting. I very strongly support that.

My last remark is that it is not just a matter of any military benefit that may come from the reserves or from the cadets—the benefit goes much wider than that. That is why the appointment of the director general is so important. The morale of our country is bound up with cadet force and reserve activity. I see in my constituency how much good is being done by young people through cadet activities. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is listening, and he will agree that this is not just a military matter. It does not matter what the top brass say, as they may be interested only in the military benefits. This is a national issue. We want more young people involved, not fewer. For all those reasons—and for many others that the House will not thank me for speaking on at length—I am delighted to support the new clause.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I am delighted to offer my support for the new clause, and that will come as no surprise to my colleagues on the Front Bench. I believe that we must understand the difficulties of being an auxiliary or a reservist. One faces problems at work and difficulties with one's family when one is required to enter into and accept commitments that impinge on family activities and family life. It is because of that that the House must debate fully and adequately the importance of leadership.

I have no complaints about the quality of the senior air staff officers who have held the post of the officer commanding the Air Cadets. We have been fortunate, as we have had some superb people in these posts. In addition, the director general of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force is a Member of the House—my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who has active experience and has served in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. It is the combination of those things and experiences that brings together the people who provide leadership and, more importantly, the understanding of what it means to an individual to be a member of the Territorials, the reserves or the auxiliary forces. That is why we must consider carefully what the Bill does.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows of my concerns about discrimination, which we debated at some length in Committee. He will therefore understand that paragraphs (3)(a) to (e) of new clause 1 are important because they address some of those concerns. I accept that they will not put into statute exactly what I was trying to achieve in Committee, but they at least begin to address my anxieties. I hope that he will carefully consider new clause 1 and respond in a manner that will convince the House and the country that the Government understand that unless we have the right people in the key posts, it is possible that we will not have the number of reservists and auxiliaries that we need to augment our substantially reduced Regular military capability.

Many Conservative Members feel that we are cutting things rather fine with our current forces numbers. We welcome the improvement in equipment and believe that our Regular forces are best equipped if their numbers are smaller. However, the Regulars will be effective during hostilities only if they can call on the necessary number of reserves to augment them, or back them up in key posts, when they are sent off to a conflict. It was especially important that we addressed the problems facing the medical profession in Committee. New clause 1 deals with that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) said, this debate is important because it affects the whole country. It is important for the reserve forces but also for the cadet forces. There has been some concern in the air cadets about proposed changes in the command structures and to the position of the air officer commanding. I believe that the top man, whatever the

[Mr. Bill Walker]

field, should be a hands-on man with whom reservists can have regular contact and exchange ideas and whom they can approach easily. That is not in any way to diminish the necessary military environment, which is essential. When we are dealing with volunteers, it is important that they can see that such two-way communication is working. Before we change the structures, especially command structures, it is important to take that aspect into consideration.

Another vital aspect is often overlooked. While the Ministry of Defence, and therefore the public purse, picks up the bulk of the costs of our cadet forces, the cadets, by virtue of the way in which they operate, are required to raise substantial sums in their own right. That is why they are registered as charities. We should not in any way put at risk that charitable status because it is the mechanism through which the bulk of their extra funding comes.

We had a good and constructive debate in Committee and I believe that members of the auxiliaries and the reserves feel that the Committee and the House cares. I make that as a cross-party point, not a partisan one.

If we get the structure and the leadership right, we shall have served the country well. If we do not get it right in the current Bill, it will be a long time before we consider another one. Experience as a reservist has taught me that if one does not take the opportunity to make changes, it can often take nearly a lifetime to bring them about later, as it did in my case. Therefore, we need to get it right this time. I am confident that my hon. Friend the Minister understands that and I hope that when he replies to the debate he will have something positive to say about the new clause.

4 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Having made one's maiden speech on the subject, it is gratifying to find the ethos and motivation of that speech coming to fruition some 26 years later in that we are establishing a legislative framework which will enable Britain fully to utilise the potential of the reserve forces of all three services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has done the House a great service by tabling new clause 1, which is the summation of all we have been seeking to achieve. My hon. Friend is infinitely more experienced than I am in these matters and he holds the Territorial decoration for his gallant service in the reserve forces over many years. Moreover, in this place he can be described as TD—or truly dedicated. He has consistently advocated better use of the reserve forces; he has travelled overseas to conduct research; he has written extensively; he has been active in Committee and on the Floor of the House; and now he has introduced a new clause that not only has merit in itself, but sets out the good grounds for its acceptance by the Government and the House.

We know that the Bill will not be the last word on the reserve forces—I hope it is not—but the appointment of a two-star officer from the reserve forces as director general in the Ministry of Defence, will mean that there will be in post at the heart of the policy-making machinery on the nation's defence, someone with the experience and the status to make a significant contribution and continue the modernisation process of the reserves which will have been set in train by the Bill.

I particularly welcome the exceptionally ecumenical nature of my hon. Friend's new clause. It is a genuinely tri-service measure. Like many Conservatives, my hon. Friend holds the Territorial Army particularly dear, but we know that reserves of all three forces are required and that the greatest deficiencies are in the naval and air reserves rather than in the Territorial Army as in recent years, the Army has been more imaginative than the Navy and the Air Force in its use of reserves.

I shall just re-emphasise a few of the points that my hon. Friends have already made. The first relates to status. When dealing with the Ministry of Defence, one cannot over-emphasise the importance of status—it is jealously guarded and earnestly sought. Once obtained, it has to be earned. The gallant gentleman, the two-star officer who will hold the post will be doubly qualified—he will have authority of all three services within the military community and within the civilian community. This dual role is crucial and will enable him to carry weight in a sense that no Regular officer could ever do, particularly among the civilian community, with which the reservists have to deal and from which they are drawn.

The officer must carry authority with the Territorial and Volunteer Reserve Associations. There is a risk that the TAVRAs might be a little jealous and think that a two-star officer would intrude on their territory. However, the new clause makes it clear that he would work with the TAVRAs regarding all aspects of recruiting and manning. Therefore, they should not be rigorous custodians of their terrain but instead use their imagination and welcome the appointment.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) referred to the medical services. Those services are becoming more reliant on reservists in all three armed forces. I have received a letter from the British Medical Association welcoming the new clause and expressing the hope that it will be carried into law.

Many of my constituents in Ruislip-Northwood are involved in air transport activities. RAF Northolt is a dual-use station which is also used by civilian aircraft and Heathrow is the biggest single employer in my area. At times of emergency or war, our armed forces may have to requisition civilian aircraft for military purposes and that somewhat sensitive and difficult role must be executed diplomatically. It can only be helpful to have in post someone with experience in commerce—and preferably with an air transport background—when dealing with the Department of Transport and the aviation industry, as my hon. Friend pointed out. The point applies also to the National Employers Liaison Committee.

The reservist two-star officer would have a proselytising role. He would have to support the university air squadrons, the university sea cadet corps and the university officers training corps in their attempts to ensure that graduates do not simply enter the Regular forces upon completion of their service. He must make it clear that they can play an equally valid role in the reserves. The number of schools liaison officers at the Ministry of Defence has been rigorously cut—like so much else—and their role could be reinforced by the reservist two-star officer.

The officer would also have an overseas representational role. If the director is merely a seconded Regular officer of one-star rank, it creates the impression that Her Majesty's Government do not give the emphasis

to our reservists that is accorded to those in other countries where the reserve forces are used more effectively. The United States is a prime example, but I could also cite Switzerland, Israel and others. We have much to learn from those countries about the cost-effective potential of the reserve forces. The Ministry of Defence would do well to have on hand the expertise of a highly qualified, experienced two-star reservist officer who would represent the reserves overseas.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has recognised that Regular officer back-up is essential. It is important to have on hand a one-star officer, such as a brigadier, air commodore or commodore, who would ensure that the Regular forces aspects of the reservist commitment are understood and that reservists are not out of line with thinking in the Regular forces.

In conclusion, I reiterate the warmth of my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury. I note that the co-signatories to his new clause have all worn uniform and have all been members of Her Majesty's Regular forces. From the perspective of their Regular service, they understand the merits of having a reservist two-star officer as director general in the Ministry of Defence.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, who has worn uniform as a Regular, will join us in supporting the new clause.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I very much agree with the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who pointed out the importance of this issue, and expressed the wish that we could spend more time discussing such issues, with more hon. Members present, and see them reported more widely. Nevertheless, I must say, as I gaze at the empty spaces in the heavens above us, that, no matter how often we discuss defence and no matter how important the subject, it appears that those who report our debates to the nation have their own priorities and their own agenda when it comes to the military—and unfortunately, matters of great importance go largely unreported.

On the substance of new clause 1, it will not surprise Conservative Members who spoke in its favour to know that I and my colleagues have considerable sympathy with what they said. Several times in the past few years, I have spoken about the importance of the Territorial Army in particular and reserves in general, which I believe extends far beyond their pure military importance, crucial though that is. There is an increasing gap between civilian society and military society because of the lack of conscription, and the reduced numbers, with every passing year, of those who have served in the armed forces. That gap can be bridged largely, although not exclusively, by the membership of the reserve forces and the cadets.

The argument, although laid out in detail in the new clause, may be made briefly. Hon. Members who argue for the new clause say two things. First, they say that the director general of the reserve forces should be a member of the reserve forces himself or herself. Secondly, they say that the status of the post should be improved, to generate not only internally but externally—among members of the Regular Army, politicians and the public—an understanding that the post is viewed with importance by those who must take decisions.

Hon. Members have made a good case for that, for three reasons. First, there is a feeling—justified or not—which I perceive as I speak to members of the reserve forces, that they may sometimes be treated as second-class citizens by the Regular armed forces. Whether that is the result of lack of understanding or of the natural self-interest of members of the Regular forces, I do not know, but there is a good case, at a time when we are discussing and backing a "one army" or "one armed force" concept, for doing everything possible to overcome that perception by telling members of our reserve forces, "Yes, we do regard you as equal partners in this one army, this one armed force. To signify that, we shall make the small but significant change of saying that the leadership of this part of the united armed forces will be drawn from the reserves."

The second argument was made by every hon. Member who spoke—that we must have at the centre of our policy making, our strategic tactical thinking about doctrine and practical problems like mobilisation, someone who has experience, not only of the positive attributes of our reserve forces, but of the problems that confront a member of the reserve force that do not confront Regulars.

Family problems, which were mentioned, always exist in the Regulars, but are especially acute in the reserves. There are employment problems, which obviously apply only to reserves, and may apply even more now that we are creating new categories of reserves. There are also general logistical problems. No matter how bright and committed the regular soldier, service man or woman who is appointed director general, with the best will in the world they will not have personal experience.

My third reason can be put more simply. The Defence Select Committee—people who are well versed, well exercised and obviously deeply knowledgeable on the subject, as was demonstrated by their report on reserve forces and the Territorial Army—feels that this subject is worthy of consideration. If I were Minister, that would be enough to make me think.

In addition to the Committee's report, I refer to the list of names at the top of the new clause—I am not being patronising—which includes the hon. Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), et cetera. When hon. Members who take such an interest in this subject feel compelled to table a new clause, it has to be given the utmost consideration.

4.15 pm

I have one reservation: it is neither my style nor my inclination to impose a detailed structural amendment on the armed forces when they appear to be not entirely happy with it. However, I understand that, on this occasion, there may be less ground for such reluctance, because most of the people who have been involved in this are regular members of the armed forces. There has also been wide consultation on this document. However, we should not get to this stage and not give the Minister one more chance to consult people. That would be pushing it a little too precipitately, as there will be other occasions on which the Bill will be discussed in the House.

Obviously, I am an Opposition Member and I do not have access to consultations of this nature—yet. My colleagues and I will listen attentively to what the

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Minister says tonight. I urge him to take full consideration of the arguments that have been put by his hon. Friends and by the Defence Select Committee, and of the views that are widely held by members of the reserve forces. We value the reserve forces, and we are saying to them that they are part of a "one armed force" concept. This small step would be symbolic, and would show that we are prepared to say that and to do it in practice.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) who, over the years, has campaigned assiduously on behalf of the volunteer reserves. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said, hardly a day goes by without a new pamphlet about the reserve forces emerging from my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury.

My hon. Friend has a tremendous energy and an endless stream of ideas about how to make the best use of part of the armed forces of which he is enormously proud and to which he has devoted a great deal of time. He is full to overflowing with ideas for these energetic, well-qualified and well-informed young men and women, all of whom have a greater role to play than perhaps they are able to play now—and everything that we would like to do in future recognises that fact. The legislation seeks to make greater use of our reserve forces.

My hon. Friend is well known as a former serving officer in the Territorial Army. His opinions and advice have always been of great value to us. I pay tribute to him for his unstinting support for the Bill. He was one of the first hon. Members to tell me of his personal and wholehearted support for the legislation. I thank him for the hard work he does in the interests of the reserves.

As I said, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury that the Territorial Army has an extraordinary abundance of people with the enthusiasm and desire to serve their country. I hope that he will feel that that is precisely what we are trying to facilitate within the overall spirit of the legislation.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will the Minister consider one small point during the Bill's passage through the House? Although TA regulations currently make it clear that the commanding officer of a TA unit should be from the reserves, only four units have such commanding officers, whereas the rest are commanded by Regulars. I think that there is a real problem about the type of message we are sending to those who aspire to run such units and to have an alternative career structure. Will the Minister consider that matter?

Mr. Soames: I will consider it. If my hon. Friend will let me develop my argument, perhaps he and I could discuss that matter in the light of some figures that I plan to lay before the House later in the debate.

I agree entirely with the spirit behind the new clause, and I acknowledge—again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood said—that it is supported by a number of my hon. Friends, all of whom have served in the armed forces, and by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid).

I acknowledge that, in moving the new clause, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury is seeking to help to improve the arrangements for advice on reserve matters to Ministers and to the Chiefs of Staff. I hope that he will not think that I am being patronising if I say that I know that his heart is entirely in the right place, and I have every sympathy with his sentiments. I share his anxieties that such advice should be given well and effectively, and that it is currently not as well or as effectively given as it should be.

It may be of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury and to other hon. Members if I were to outline how matters are, I believe, already improving. I hope that this will be of some comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith).

First, 35 major units out of 107 of the Territorial Army are commanded by TA officers. They hold the rank of lieutenant-colonel or, in certain cases, of colonel. As well as being a significant achievement in its own right, that ensures that advice to the chain of command is given in the normal way, from officers with a reservist perspective. I wholly agree with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury about the cadet forces.

Mr. Brazier: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his generous words, but I honestly wonder what he meant by what he said. Is he saying that it is a significant achievement that less than one third of our TA units are commanded by reservists, whereas the TA regulations say that a reservist should always command such units unless there is no suitable candidate? Only four units out of 31 in the infantry are commanded by a reservist, while the comparative figures for Canada, America and Australia are more than 90 per cent.

Mr. Soames: I shall come to comparisons with Canada and America later in the debate. I believe that our achievement is remarkable. I am not saying that we cannot do better, but, in itself, that is a remarkable achievement.

As I said, I wholly agree with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury about the cadet forces. There are, additionally, no fewer than 39 TA officers currently serving at colonel level in staff appointments. That provides a further source of influence and advice at senior level from a reserve perspective.

The strength of the TA, however—as the hon. Member for Motherwell, North quite rightly said—lies in it being part of the British Army. We have one Army, not two, and it is therefore right and proper that Ministers receive advice on TA matters through one Army chain of command. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury knows, however, Ministers seek direct advice from the brigadier TA at land whenever it is appropriate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) will agree that that is just the sort of advice that Ministers need.

I take great pleasure in being able to respond to this debate, which is the denouement of 26 years of loyal and hard service by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood, who made his maiden speech on this subject. It must be very satisfying for him, after 26 years in the House, to see all this brought to fruition. I have been in the House for half that length of time and have been nowhere near any such achievement. He should be very pleased. I very much endorse what he said, and I note his experience of this matter and his support for my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury.

I should like to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson)—to whom I wish also to pay tribute for his many years of service, not only in the reserves and in the cadets—that I wholly agree with him that this is a national question, not a partisan question to do with some small section of the armed forces. The TA—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Motherwell, North is being summoned by his pager, perhaps from on high. He is being called for, Madam Speaker. I hope that it is not bad news.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood rightly said that this is a national matter. It is not something that involves only a chunk of our service life. The matter goes much further than the TA. Indeed, it goes to the ethos of service, to the encouragement of cadets and the importance that cadets, territorial and regular service life play in our national community.

In some excellent debates in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) encouraged, among other things, greater use of the reserve forces. I am pleased to announce that the Royal Air Force Reserve has come forward with an innovative concept that will enable reservists to take their rightful place alongside Royal Air Force personnel who are engaged in operations.

The development of composite squadrons was foreshadowed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who, alas, cannot be with us today because he has been struck down by flu. He presaged the development of such squadrons on Second Reading. No one has been more unstinting nor more devoted in pressing for this important change in legislation. I know that the House will want to wish my right hon. Friend well.

I am delighted to be able to announce—I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries will be delighted to hear—that the Royal Air Force intends to form a Royal Auxiliary Air Force helicopter support squadron on 1 October 1996, which will be based at RAF Benson.

Initially, the concept of working in an operational environment alongside regular personnel will be tested to establish how a composite squadron might augment the support helicopter force in times of crisis, if successful. The concept may well be extended to other operational roles. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will be pleased that the RAF has been able to come forward with an admirable further use of reserves in an extremely important area.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for making an announcement that will be widely welcomed in the House and throughout the country. Will the concept allow an overdue opportunity for one of the existing Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadrons to be resuscitated, together with a squadron badge and a colour?

Mr. Soames: I am not able to make that announcement today; the whys, wherefores and hows are being examined. As my hon. Friend knows, nothing would give Conservative Members greater pleasure than to be able to do what he asks. I am sure that he can think of suitable numbers and badges. We may decide not to go into those matters today.

As an example of the sort of advice we receive from the TA and through the chain of command, I remind the House and those who served in Committee that I quoted from a letter from the Brigadier TA, Richard Holmes, who wrote to me on whether an anti-discrimination measure would be useful. Those present in Committee will recall that he expressed himself forcefully and, I believe, correctly.

In addition to the Brigadier TA, there are corresponding roles in the other volunteer reserves. The Royal Naval Reserve has the Commodore Royal Naval Reserve. The Royal Marines Reserve has the Colonel Royal Marines Reserve. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force has the Inspector Royal Auxiliary Air Forces. Ministers, senior officers and officials regularly receive and seek advice from these officers. In addition, there is a TA colonel on the staff of the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets, who advises specifically on volunteer reserve matters.

As my hon. Friend knows, I regularly see serving TA officers. I take the most careful note of their advice, which is often invaluable. I have extensive contacts in my capacity as Minister of State for the Armed Forces with the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve Association and with many serving TA officers at all ranks.

We wish TA officers to achieve higher ranks and to fulfil the demanding requirements of command and staff appointments. That means that they need access to relevant courses and appropriate opportunities for career development in the TA. We are therefore considering opportunities to increase the scope of TA officers to obtain the necessary qualifications for command and staff appointments. We intend especially to encourage a further TA presence at the junior command and staff college.

In addition, I am actively considering the possibility of TA officers attending the higher command and staff college. I aim to increase the number of TA staff appointments at lieutenant-colonel and major levels, which will help to broaden the range and experience of serving officers, and so fit them for a wider and higher range of command.

A further development, with which I hope the House will be pleased, is our intention to appoint TA brigadiers to a post in the directorate of development and doctrine some time later this year, and also the post of Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets in the Ministry of Defence in 1997. I hope that it will be possible to announce the appointment to the doctrine post before the summer recess. It goes without saying that all appointments will—and I know my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury entirely understands—be subject to the availability of candidates of the appropriate calibre.

4.30 pm

Mr. Brazier: Of course, the appointments must be subject to the availability of candidates of the appropriate calibre. Will my hon. Friend give a pledge here and now that the posts will not be confined to candidates who are available full-time? Given that counterpart posts in Canada, Australia and many individual American states are ably filled by part-timers, can my hon. Friend confirm that part-timers will be allowed to fill those posts?

Mr. Soames: If my hon. Friend can contain himself for one minute, I hope that I will be able to give him some news that may give him more pleasure than he has a right to expect.

It goes without saying that all appointments will be subject to the availability of candidates of the appropriate calibre who are able and willing to take up the post.

[Mr. Soames]

The post of Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets was intended to be full-time. However, it is often difficult to find suitable candidates from the reserves to take up full-time appointments.

The high-calibre individuals we would seek almost invariably have a challenging, rewarding and extremely demanding civilian career. It is not easy for them to drop that career for a two or three-year tour in a reserve job. The higher the rank, the greater is the difficulty, especially if candidates have been expected already to devote considerable time to command and staff tours.

The difficulties would have prevented us from appointing a reserve officer to the post of Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets on a full-time basis. I have therefore decided that the post should be filled on a part-time basis. That will give the services a number of possible candidates from whom to pick the officer best suited for the job. I hope that that will lead to an early decision on the appointment, which could take effect in 1997. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will welcome that as a significant and important development. It underlines our determination to make the best possible use of the expertise available to us in the reserve forces.

The new clause envisages the creation of a part-time two-star post. The incumbent of such a post would find it, in our judgment, extremely difficult to undertake the tasks. He could hardly be held accountable for the activities of a large full-time staff, and he therefore could not hold executive authority. The post might be regarded as purely advisory, but the terms of the new clause are not consistent with that. In any event, such a senior adviser could hardly avoid interfering with the real responsibilities of the chain of command.

As I have mentioned, many sources of advice on reserve issues are available to Ministers. I receive frequent advice from my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries from my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury, for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), for Ruislip-Northwood, for Tayside, North and other hon. Friends, as well as from many other areas of what is now known as the reserve community.

It is also difficult to see how a TA officer who, by the nature of his life, will inevitably have spent only short periods in full-time military appointments, could obtain the necessary experience and qualifications to fill a two-star post with responsibilities that will necessarily go wider than purely reserve matters. To do an executive job effectively in the Ministry of Defence needs a different background and experience from that which a reservist will, with the best will in the world, by circumstance be able to possess.

We already have a two-star focus for reserves in the post of the Defence Services Secretary, to whom the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets reports. As a regular officer, the Defence Services Secretary has the experience and depth of knowledge to integrate the advice he receives from reservists into the wider picture.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury will be aware that the Supreme Allied Commander Europe—SACEUR—is looking for input via the NATO national reserve forces committee on much wider issues connected with the establishment and use of reserves. To make an effective contribution to such discussions requires a knowledge and understanding of military issues of doctrine, training and resources that inevitably goes wider than the experience that a volunteer reservist would have been able to gain, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way for the third time.

The posts on that committee are filled by American and Canadian reservists. Although we welcome what my hon. Friend said earlier, many of us remain committed to the view that, if a Canadian or American reservist general can fill such a post, there is no reason why a British reservist general cannot do so.

Mr. Soames: I find myself in polite and deeply respectful disagreement with my hon. Friend. As he and I have established in discussions on a number of occasions, comparisons with Canada and the United States are not particularly helpful. Comparisons with the United States are unhelpful because the United States reserve forces are very much larger than ours. They have a different staff structure; in particular, they have a large cadre of full-time reservists. A reserve general in the US forces almost invariably has a career of full-time service behind him.

In Canada, many factors—geographical, historical, cultural and strategic, to name but a few—combine to make the Canadian position very different from ours, as I discovered when I went to Canada last year and spent quite a long time with the reserve forces there. We have frequent staff discussions about reserves with the Canadians, and, indeed, with our other NATO allies. The NATO national reserve forces committee provides a specific six-monthly forum for meetings, but there are other important informal contacts. Each of us seeks to learn from the practice of the others. It would, however, be wrong to think that any particular aspect could be simply transplanted from one nation to another.

Most important, I believe that it would be highly damaging to the high reputation and credibility of the Territorial Army if a special two-star post were created merely as a token gesture, especially if it were subsequently filled by an unsuitable candidate. Furthermore, I am convinced that it would be difficult to justify the creation of such a post at a time when the number of two-star posts in the services is being reduced.

For example, in April 1993 there were 56 two-star posts in the Army; there are now only 38, and there are plans to abolish another four by the end of 1997. There is also little evidence that many TA officers aspire to two-star appointments, or consider that the absence of a two-star appointment adversely affects the management of the TA.

Altogether, I consider that the creation of a two-star reservist post is both unnecessary and, at this stage, inappropriate. However, I share my hon. Friend's view that the TA needs to feel that its views are taken fully into account in, perhaps, a more obvious way, and to see that its wishes have been translated into action. Considering that we make such play of the one-army structure, that is only fair. I am considering how I may achieve such a result, and I shall discuss the matter further with the Chief of Defence Staff.

Mr. Bill Walker: I realise that much of the debate concerns the Territorial Army, but my hon. Friend will realise that the Royal Air Force has its different structures. Indeed, he touched on that in connection with the appointment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). There is also the question of the air officer in command of the air cadets, who is a full-time regular RAF officer. Let me make it clear that I am not unhappy with that appointment; what concerns me is that we may be contemplating changes, and may not have looked at where all the ripples are going. It is vital that we do so before finally pledging ourselves.

Mr. Soames: I hope that my hon. Friend knows that, as a keen fisherman, I always look where all the ripples are going. At least 10 per cent. of a speech that I have tried to make as brief as possible was, in fact, devoted to making a major announcement about the RAF, so my hon. Friend has had quite a good go of it.

Irrespective of what I have said, there are a number of technical reasons why I cannot accept the new clause as it stands. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand. I feel obliged, out of courtesy, to list those reasons briefly. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) apparently does not want to know those reasons, but I am sure that he will find them interesting.

First, the Crown has always had the power to decide how to organise the armed forces and, in particular, to create or disestablish particular posts.

As a matter of convention, parliamentary control over the armed forces has been limited to the numbers that may be maintained, matters of supply, the powers that are necessary to maintain the armed forces and, as we have recently done, review of the disciplinary powers that accompany the Armed Forces Bill. As far as I am aware, there has never been any post in the armed forces, regular or reserve, that has required to be established by statutory power. We should not create a precedent in this case.

It has also always been within the Crown's prerogative powers to decide which officers to appoint to particular positions, what their duties should be and the staff they should have. The new clause would dictate the appointment, its role and the support it must have. It would even specify the identity of the first incumbent of the proposed chief of staff post. As far as I am aware, there is no precedent for laying those matters down in statute. For that reason if no other, I feel bound to resist the new clause.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood said, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has done a signal service for the Territorial Army and for the wider reserves in instigating this debate. His enthusiasm and support for the reserve forces is truly appreciated by us all. I trust that, in the light of what I have said, my hon. Friend will feel able to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Brazier: I welcome the strong progress in the right direction that has been announced by my hon. Friend. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 6

PERMANENT STAFF OF THE RESERVE FORCES

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 12, at end insert—

'(3) Parliament shall authorise a maximum number of members of the permanent staff of the reserve forces.'.

The debate on new clause 1 was interesting and well informed. The thread running through the debates in the House and in Committee was a determination by all hon. Members to ensure that their speeches were well informed.

Parliament has already given powers to authorise the level of the reserve forces, and the amendment refers specifically to the number of permanent people in those forces. They are the non-regular permanent staff or NRPS and the permanent staff administrative officers or PSAOs. As the House knows, those are uniformed administrators. Some months ago the Select Committee on Defence criticised the high number of administrators.

Since 1991, there has been a 17 per cent. increase in non-regular permanent staff, compared with a 33 per cent. decline in the size of the Territorial Army. To pay for those permanent TA members, the nation has to spend nearly £39 million in the current year. No one is suggesting for a second that those officers are in any sense bad at their jobs. We suggest, however, and the Select Committee recommends, much closer monitoring and scrutiny of the number of non-regular permanent staff. The Select Committee report states:

"We look to MoD to monitor closely the tasks carried out by Regular and NRPS staff, to civilianise those with no genuine military content, to make full use of the commercial contracts available to the Regular Army and to seek to reduce the current levels of administrative support wherever possible."

Together, the NRPS and the PSAOs account for the most substantial portion of unit pay and expenditure. It is an additional tier of administration with its own career structure, allowances, housing, subsistence, travel, leave and pensions, and it has relatively unlimited tenure. We have a greater proportion of non-regular permanent staff in our Territorial Army than any other Commonwealth country or the United States reserve forces.

Our probing amendment asks the Minister to reassure the House—as he reassured the Committee, but we need further reassurance—that there will be much closer scrutiny and monitoring of these matters with separate accounting to the Regular Army and to the Territorial Army. The non-regular permanent staff should be on fixed-term postings and should be rotated between units and answerable to the commanding officers of TA units. The issue is of grave concern to us all because of the amount of money spent and the number of people involved. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

4.45 pm

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising a matter that we discussed in Committee. He is right to air it again in the House. After considering what was said in Committee and hearing the arguments, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman and I disagree on any material point. However, I hope that he will agree that his probing amendment would not be helpful; nor would it

[Mr. Soames]

have the effect that he desires. I shall assist by going into a little more detail about the origins, background and present role of the permanent staff.

The origins of the Territorial Army's non-regular permanent staff go back to the setting up of the TA in 1907 when provision was made for there to be permanent staff. Normally, they were to be members of the regular forces, but in special circumstances they could be members of the TA. When setting up the Territorial Army Lord Haldane recognised that it was essential for it to be competently trained and administered, and those requirements hold good today.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) would agree that the size of the permanent staff should not be at the expense of the operational strength of the TA. He made that point strongly in Committee and we all share it. He will also agree that it is important that the volunteer reserve should be appropriately administered and trained. As my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) made plain in Committee, volunteers want to join the TA to do real soldiering, not to carry out purely administrative tasks. The permanent staff frees volunteer reserve officers and senior non-commissioned officers from routine administration, permitting them to concentrate on arranging interesting and challenging training for their units, which surveys have shown to be crucial to improving retention in the TA.

Despite our broad agreement, I do not think that the amendment will do what the hon. Gentleman wants it to do. Regular numbers are already subject to strict control and it would be novel for Parliament to seek to control how they are posted or employed. Moreover, the dividing line between permanent staff and ordinary training and staff functions can sometimes be difficult to define. Some Regular service men who are not classed as permanent staff may spend a significant amount of time in direct or indirect support of the TA. The amendment would therefore be unworkable, but I accept that the hon. Gentleman is merely seeking clarification.

I am happy to repeat the reassurance that he seeks, and which I gave in Committee, that we fully accept the need to watch the numbers in the permanent staff, whether Regular or non-Regular. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to assess the level and nature of full-time support in the TA to suit its circumstances. In the light of what I have said, I hope that he will feel able to seek leave to withdraw his admirable but probing amendment.

Mr. Murphy: On the basis of those assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 27

VOLUNTARY TRAINING AND OTHER DUTIES

Mr. Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 12, leave out lines 21 to 24.

This matter was discussed in Committee and relates to voluntary training and other voluntary duties in Britain and elsewhere. This is a probing amendment with the aim of urging the Minister to tell the House the reasoning behind the clause. Voluntary training is unpaid, of course, and sports, competitions, social events and the raising of funds for charities might be described in the normal run of things as voluntary and unpaid. However, training which is individual, which is for the purposes of the trades concerned and which is promotional and regimental should be matters for payment.

Where Territorial Army facilities are hired on a private or on a commercial basis by reservists, the individual is off duty and military law should not apply. The danger is—the Minister referred in Committee to a number of examples which could be regarded as voluntary training, including moving ammunition by truck—that the line between what should be voluntary and what is paid can sometimes be an interesting and delicate one. Our fear is that if we are not careful we could end up with training for our reservists on the cheap. That is undesirable. It is not the Bill's purpose and I look forward again to the Minister's reply.

Mr. Soames: Again, we discussed this in Committee, and the hon. Member for Torfaen is right that it is a difficult matter. I hope that we have done enough in the Bill to put on the record the fact that there is little between us. Again, it may help if I repeat the explanation that I gave in Committee on the background to clause 27.

If each volunteer reservist carried out only his or her 19 or 27-day annual commitment, the volunteer reserve forces could hardly function. That means that reservists, especially officers, warrant officers and senior non-commissioned officers, need to do more than that.

Clause 27(1)(a) replicates the effect of section 43 of the Reserve Forces Act 1980. It permits reservists to undertake additional voluntary training. The effect of the Act has been to restrict reservists' activities when not called out to those activities which can be classified as training. That has proved irksome and the purpose of clause 27(1)(b) is to extend the power to include "voluntary duties".

The wording makes it clear that the provision applies irrespective of whether the initiative comes from the individual or from the services and irrespective of whether the activity could be described as training. Voluntary duties would cover a wide range of activities. A most mundane example might be, as we said in Committee, collecting a new truck from the storage depot—an example mentioned by hon. Gentleman. Towards the opposite end of the scale, it might involve a Territorial Army regiment moving ammunition from a depot to a port ready for loading for an operation. The list is endless.

As I have said, the formal restriction of reserve activities when not called out to those which can be classified as training has proved irksome. The wording makes it clear that an individual is allowed to perform such training or duties and can lawfully do so irrespective of whether the individual asks to perform the training or duty concerned or is asked to do so by the services. It is lawful for an individual to perform such tasks, regardless of whether the activity can be described as training or duty. That allows the deep well of enthusiasm for such tasks within the volunteer reserve to be tapped with minimum bureaucracy.

Without the clause, it would not be explicitly clear that individuals are permitted to undertake such additional voluntary training or duties. It would be a pointless restriction to prevent the reserve forces from harnessing the enthusiasm and keenness of the volunteers, but

without the words in the clause, it would not be beyond all doubt that such activities were permitted. That ambiguity should be avoided. I hope, therefore, that I have said enough to persuade the hon. Gentleman to seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Murphy: I understand the reasoning behind the clause and I do not intend to divide the House on the matter, but I still think that it is important for this country's reservists to understand that there is a difference between voluntary training and what they should properly be paid for in terms of training. There could sometimes be very considerable grey areas. That is not the Bill's intention. However, I am encouraged by the Minister's words and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 36

PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL OF NUMBERS AND REPORTS

Mr. Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 17, line 34, leave out 'from time to time' and insert

'at least every five years'.

The amendment refers to the parliamentary control of numbers and reports. Throughout the passage of the Bill, there has been considerable reference to the need for the House and the other place to have the opportunity from time to time to debate the number of men and women in our reserve forces. Again, the amendment is a probing one. However, the period suggested in the amendment—that reports should come to the House every five years—has not been simply plucked out of thin air.

The Minister has spent the past few months as a leading member of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, so he is aware that that legislation comes before the House every five years. The amendment refers to the same period. What happens, for example, if the number of reservists falls below the number that is healthy for the proper running of the reserve forces in this country? Do we have to wait an indeterminate length of time before the Minister talks to us in the House about the position? From time to time, and every five years as of right, the House should have the opportunity to discuss not only the number of reservists in all three armed forces, but any problems which might arise in those forces.

The second point of the amendment is this. What method of control will the House of Commons have, and what mechanism does the clause envisage, in relation to, for example, over-staffing, as much as to under-staffing? How does the Minister envisage the House debating the issue? It is not made clear in the Bill and we did not have the opportunity to discuss it in Committee. We therefore look forward to the Minister's comments on this important matter.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this important point. We should start with the basic premise that Parliament will be interested in call-out. The Bill therefore rightly requires the use of the call-out powers to be reported

"forthwith to each House of Parliament".

The arrangements for high-readiness reserves in part IV of the Bill are different. They might be required in small numbers at short notice. They might also be required in circumstances in which a formal declaration of call-out might be an unhelpful political signal.

A further consideration is that each individual will voluntarily have entered into a special agreement and his or her employer will have consented to that. They will therefore not need the safeguard that immediate reporting to Parliament provides. The Bill therefore provides for reporting to be at the discretion of the Secretary of State. It specifically mentions, in clause 36(4), that reports may be made before or after the use of the power.

I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's points. I remain unconvinced that the amendment is appropriate, but I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to something which is perhaps not made so plain as we would like. However, I cannot conceive and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman cannot conceive of any circumstance in which a report would not be made to the House of Commons.

The pattern of reports and what they contain may, of course, vary. For example, the Secretary of State might report the commencement of an operation and the associated call-out of reservists under part IV, and then not make a further report until there is some change to that report. There may be successive call-outs of individuals to provide continuous manning of a small number of posts, as sometimes happens during major call-outs now. Such events would not be of sufficient interest to be reported, although at present all those are placed in the Library. However, if the operation was prolonged, there might be occasional written reports on the call-out of further reservists. At the conclusion of the operation, when all reservists had been released from service, the Secretary of State would probably wish to report that fact and record any successes or lessons learnt. It would, of course, always be open for hon. Members or Peers to request information on any aspect of the use made of the powers by tabling questions.

In those circumstances, the Bill as drafted is satisfactory. It allows for the level and detail of reports to be tailored to the needs of the situation prevailing at the time. I hope that—as in the spirit of the debates on previous amendments—in the light of my assurances as to the pattern of reports that we envisage, the hon. Gentleman will feel able to seek leave to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Murphy: The Minister's hopes will be realised now that we have those reassurances. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 37

INTERPRETATION OF PART IV

Dr. Reid: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 18, leave out lines 13 to 15.

The amendment would delete subsection (3), which refers to the powers of the Secretary of State to make regulations to provide

"as to when a contract of service is to be treated for the purposes of this Part as normally involving or not involving employment for 14 hours or more weekly."

[Dr. Reid]

We have a number of questions about the clause, and a number of concerns to do with the relationship between this provision and the recent legislation on the jobseeker's allowance.

5 pm

Despite having received an explanation in Committee of where the 14-hour period comes from, we would like to hear it again. The Minister said in Committee that it was not wholly arbitrary, but had been chosen because it represented two working days. For most people, I should have thought, that would be 16 hours. Certainly that is the number used by the Department of Social Security, but for some reason the Ministry of Defence prefers 14 hours. The basic Territorial Army commitment is for more than 16 hours a week, pro rata, so why is there no TA part-time employment protection?

We also seek explanations of several other issues to do with the relationship between unemployed reservists and state benefits. Under the current rules, travelling and other expenses, allowances or bounty are disregarded when assessing unemployment benefit and income support. While daily earnings above a certain amount affect unemployment benefit and income support entitlement, the first 16 training nights are excluded from such calculations for reservists under current—that is to say, pre-jobseeker's allowance—legislation.

Weekly net earnings above £61 negate a full week's benefits; but the benefit week for DSS purposes usually runs from Sunday to Saturday. That means that pay earned by a TA soldier over a training weekend will affect his or her benefits in two consecutive weeks; hence the benefit entitlement in both weeks will be affected by any money received by weekend training.

Reservists attending camps are usually allowed to sign off the register and re-sign when they return. As far as I know, jobcentres acting as agents of the DSS have the flexibility to amend benefit weeks. There is also evidence, under current implementation of DSS benefit regulations, that different offices interpret regulations in different ways when dealing with reservists.

In response to some of our inquiries, we were grateful to receive a letter, from the Minister to me, dated 21 April. It reassured us on some points; it is worth noting them here since it is always useful to put these things on the record in *Hansard*. We welcome the fact that the Minister pointed out that the DSS had agreed that reservists claiming jobseeker's allowance should be able to benefit from a number of special rules. First, most jobseeker's allowance claimants will be able to keep the first £5 of weekly earnings, but it has been agreed that reservists—after all, they serve their country—will be able to keep the first £15.

We also welcome the fact that any annual bounty will be treated as capital, not income; so, for the vast majority of claimants, bounty will have no effect on their benefits. No doubt the Minister will confirm that today.

Most important, reservists will be exempt from the 16-hour remunerative work rule that will operate with the jobseeker's allowance. If that exemption were not offered, entitlement to the jobseeker's allowance would automatically be lost if the claimant spent 16 hours or more on his duties in any week. We agree that these arrangements provide for what the Minister called a significantly more generous treatment of the earnings of reservists. That is only right, as they are prepared to sacrifice their free time to the service of their country and, on occasion, to make the ultimate sacrifice.

One or two other small points in the great scheme of this 132-clause Bill will affect individual reservists. I refer to the idea of travel expenses being regarded as income when entitlement to the JSA is assessed. This would badly affect reservists who had to make long journeys to their units. It would be particularly unwelcome to Territorial Army Volunteer Reserves that recruit over large areas. In any case, the money will not go into the pocket of the reservist. If it is deemed under DSS regulations to be income for most people, it certainly should not be for reservists.

Although the fine details of the jobseeker's allowance have not been finalised, we believe that the Sunday to Saturday benefit week will again be the norm. If so, that will affect reservists' benefits if they are unemployed for two consecutive weeks. We would consider that unfair. Furthermore, I hope that the Minister will confirm today what he outlined to me in writing about the £5, for a single person, and £10, for a married couple, disregard for earnings. The benefit week should be rephased for reservists, and travel expenses should be disregarded. They are bona fide expenses, not income. We hope, too, that jobcentres will be given a clear rule for dealing with reservists who attend camps. That would allow for parity of treatment. It is wrong that claimants should be treated differently according to the part of the country in which they reside.

Reassurances on these matters would enable us to withdraw our probing amendment in the knowledge that the rights of unemployed reservists had been safeguarded as far as lies within our power.

Mr. Soames: For a Jock, the hon. Gentleman bowls a jolly good googly: he is plainly a cricketer. That was rather a low ball at this stage of our proceedings. I shall answer his points as well as I can, and write to him about any on which I cannot give him satisfaction this evening.

I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's points with great interest. Perhaps it would clarify clause 37(3) if I explained the thinking behind it. First, the terminology. The Bill refers to a contract of service—the legal term for what we might more loosely call a contract of employment. The purpose of subsection (3) is to cope with the fact that a contract of service need not specify the hours to be worked in terms of hours per week. An individual may be on a flexible working hours agreement, or may have to work a certain number of hours or days a month rather than hours a week. A contract may even specify work measurement by output, like the old system of piecework. In many cases work could be performed for more than 14 hours a week even though the contract did not stipulate that.

Individuals with such flexible working patterns might find the high-readiness reserve particularly attractive, and we would not want to inhibit them from joining. The reasons why an employer's consent should be obtained are equally valid in those circumstances. We would not want to place an employer whose employees were on a more flexible working pattern at a disadvantage to another

employer whose work force worked a set number of hours a week. Regulations under the subsection would require an individual who worked in a flexible employment pattern broadly equivalent to 14 hours a week to obtain his employer's consent in the same way as if his contract specified 14 hours a week or more. That should serve to reassure the employers affected. All I can say is that I hope that they understand it more than I do.

I should like to cite an example that was used in Committee, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will remember. It would be inappropriate if a reservist who had a part-time job working behind a bar for a few hours occasionally had to obtain the consent of the publican. That is why clause 28 introduces the concept of qualifying employment. It provides that only employers for whom the reservist works for more than a threshold of 14 hours a week are required to give their consent. That is wholly preferable to requiring a reservist to obtain consent from every employer for whom he may work only casually or intermittently. We chose 14 hours as a good period, equivalent to just under two normal working days of eight hours.

The points that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North made about the jobseeker's allowance are important. As he will understand, there is a close dialogue between Ministers and officials in the Departments for Education and Employment and of Social Security and the MOD on the special arrangements for reservists receiving jobseeker's allowance. That dialogue has focused on the impact of part-time service on eligibility for the allowance. My understanding is that a period of called-out service, during which the reservist would of course receive full service rates of pay, would be treated under the JSA rules in just the same way as any period of full-time employment. A person who had been called out for service could not receive JSA in that period. At the end of his service, his eligibility for JSA would be reassessed on the basis of his national insurance contributions record. The detailed rules are—thank God—too complex to explain here.

It is possible for the benefit week to be adjusted. DSS officers have flexibility to do that. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North for giving me a chance to clarify the matter. Any cases of difficulty should be referred at once to the MOD, and they will be taken up with the DSS. In fact, we have just resolved one such case, and a benefit week has been changed so that a weekend's pay affects only one week's benefit.

I am aware that reservists who are claiming unemployment benefit and/or income support feel aggrieved that their travel expenses from home to their unit are treated as income. That causes particular difficulties for reservists who travel long distances to attend training at their units. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence raised the matter with my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), and asked him to review the matter when drawing up detailed regulations for the JSA. I can give a categorical assurance that the power will be used solely to clarify the position where the contract of employment is not specific about hours.

I hope that I have been able to deal with the points raised entirely fairly by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North, and that, in the light of what I have said, he will withdraw his amendment. If there are other points with which he wants me to deal, I would be happy to do so formally by letter.

Dr. Reid: For all the Minister's modesty, he batted—if that is the correct expression, since I am not a cricketer—very well. He dealt with the two main points and gave me assurances on both of them. I take it that that is a result of what he called an extremely close liaison between the Departments for Education and Employment and of Social Security and the Treasury. I am glad to see that that goes on. We in the Labour party make such liaison a practice between our shadow Departments. Such practice has obviously reaped some fruit for the Minister. Given his assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 95

OFFENCES AGAINST ORDERS AND REGULATIONS UNDER SECTION 4

5.15 pm

Dr. Reid: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 53, leave out lines 18 to 22.

The amendment refers to terminology relating to discipline which we think is ambiguous and could lead to more trouble than we expect unless it is more clearly defined. The amendment would leave out subsection (1)(b), which refers to the penalty that may be brought if a member of a reserve force

"uses threatening or insulting language or behaves in an insubordinate manner to any officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or petty officer".

The amendment's general intention is to extend military law, outwith the sphere of officers or non-commissioned officers, to 60,000 more people—members of the reserve forces—24 hours a day, whether on or off duty.

The Minister has been good enough to write to members of the Standing Committee to clarify the position. His letter has been useful so far as it goes. His letter of 2 May said:

"the offence of clause 95(1)(b) only applies where the superior is carrying out duties in pursuance of orders or regulations under clause 4."

He added that that is an important qualification of the phrase

"acting in the execution of his office",

which had been quoted to him. He said :

"The offence would not apply in ordinary civilian life, and specifically not to matters arising in the ordinary course of employment of a sponsored reservist. On the other hand, it would apply where a superior was, say, properly attempting to serve some notice connected with a reservist's duty on him."

We find that paragraph useful in limiting the scope for ambiguity and problems further down the line. However, another paragraph in the Minister's letter seemed to extend the scope. Referring to the same clause, he said:

"Generally, members of the reserve forces will be subject to those Acts"—

the service discipline Acts—

"only when they are on permanent service, on full-time reserve service under clause 24 of the Bill, on the permanent staff, or when undertaking training and duty."

[Dr. Reid]

The use of the word "generally" seems to create all sorts of problems right away, and it naturally follows that there are an unspecified number of exceptions to that general rule.

We are also concerned that subsection (1)(b) covers not only insubordination or threatening language, but insulting language. That is the second point of ambiguity. Threatening language is already a civil offence. The use of threatening language off duty is already covered by civilian law, yet it is my understanding of the definition of insubordination that it can occur only when on duty since it must be in response to an instruction or an order. Nevertheless, both the use of threatening language and insubordination can be fairly well categorised and defined. The problem is that the use of insulting language in the circumstances in which the Bill may be applied seems to be extremely ambiguous. The use of insulting language as a possible transgression of discipline in circumstances that, in the Minister's words, might "generally" apply, seems to give a double ambiguity. Subject to his answer, we reserve the right to withdraw the amendment, but we want the Minister to give a clearer definition of the word "generally" as used in the first paragraph of his letter of explanation regarding the circumstances under which the charge would normally apply.

In addition, what is insulting behaviour? I mention this because of the difficulties of defining such an offence, even when someone is on duty. Many of us will have seen a recent series on BBC Television entitled "HMS Brilliant". One particular cameo in that series—which looked at life in the armed forces and, in particular, the Navy—was an attempt to try under military law a rating for making comments that were deemed to be denigrating to an officer, but the rating had made the comments when he was off-ship and onshore. The difficulties involved—although the rating was on active service, but offshore—in trying to apply military law to a clear offence of insulting behaviour were clear.

If we were to extend the charge from those on active service to the reserve forces in circumstances that are "generally" defined, we can imagine the difficulties that will be encountered, not only with the offences of threatening behaviour or insubordination—which can be dealt with—but insulting behaviour. The proposal would seem to open a wide avenue for already well-heeled lawyers and, possibly, to create a well-trodden path between here and the European Court of Human Rights. Anything we can do to prevent that is surely a good thing.

Mr. Soames: In answering the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), I am inclined to remind him that identifying insulting behaviour is roughly the same as finding an elephant in one's bedroom and wondering whether it is an elephant. If it is there, one knows it. I agree with him that this matter deserves a proper answer, and I shall do my best to satisfy him. I wholly applaud his determination with regard to the European Court of Human Rights, which he knows the Government wholly share.

Clause 95 was the subject of detailed discussions in Committee on 23 April. The matter was raised by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who has made a significant contribution to the Bill. At that time, I promised that I would offer him reassurance in writing, and I wrote to him on 2 May. I sent copies of that letter to the other members of the Committee, but it may be for the convenience of the House if I briefly set out the background to clause 95(1)(b).

The offence is designed to close what would otherwise be a loophole in the reserve forces disciplinary code, and does so in what I believe to be a wholly proportionate way. It is necessary because members of the reserve forces are subject to service law only when they are on duty. The sole exception is that officers in the Territorial Army, Royal Auxiliary Air Force and Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who are not sponsored reserves are subject to service law at all times.

The men and women of a Territorial Army unit will generally cease to be on duty when dismissed at the muster parade at the end of the evening. They will thus not be on duty when they repair to the bar. Such social activities are vital to the coherence of a unit and an extremely important factor in retention and morale. However, those activities are not duty, and those concerned will therefore not be subject to service law. The senior officer present will have a duty to ensure that the bar is closed at the proper time in accordance with the orders or regulations. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North may find it hard to believe, but it is not unknown for TA soldiers to object to the bar being closed. A certain amount of banter is clearly wholly acceptable—more so than when I was in the Regular Army, when regimental sergeant-majors managed to charge soldiers who had said nothing with "dumb insolence".

In the TA context, there comes a point where banter becomes divisive and where it damages the cohesion and morale that social activities are intended to build. The provision in clause 95(1)(b) allows appropriate disciplinary action to be taken in such cases. The most usual penalties would be a small fine as a token punishment for those who were subsequently repentant, or discharge from the TA for those who were not. That does not constitute an interpretation or limitation of the words in the Bill.

In practice, discipline in the voluntary reserves—as the hon. Member for Motherwell, North will understand—rests very much on self-discipline. Because those who are unhappy with the requirement placed on them can resign easily, disciplinary cases are proportionately much less common than in the regular services. We would therefore not expect many cases under this clause, and we believe that its mere existence will deter those few barrack-room lawyers who like to test the system and who know where the loopholes are.

The application of the offence and of clause 95 as a whole to all reserve forces seems to us to be a sensible and proportionate step. It is a far more precise way of dealing with actual and potential problems than the alternative, which would be to extend the circumstances in which reserves are subject to service law. I very much hope that, following that explanation, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Dr. Reid: I am not entirely sure that we have made much progress on the amendment. This is the one occasion when we moved from lawyers to soldiers being

called to the bar. However, I think I see what the Minister is aiming at. I am reluctant to allow to pass through both Houses a measure which, in practice and not in theory, seems to offer all sorts of problems further down the road. We do not need these problems, because there are already enough people who are only too willing to take the opportunity—as they are perfectly entitled to do—to criticise the fairness or the practicability of military law.

This is the second time that the Minister has had to apply his mind to the matter, and I suspect that he may have to do so on a third or fourth occasion. It was encouraging that he said that it is envisaged that the clause will have a deterrent effect, although whether clause 95(1)(b) of the Reserve Forces Bill will have an immediate deterrent effect on a squaddie retiring from the bar and objecting to its closing remains to be seen.

In view of the attempts that have been made by the Government to answer the queries that were raised by Opposition Members, I will, in the spirit of our discussions, seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

5.27 pm

Mr. Soames: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I intend to speak extremely briefly and will mention only the key points that have arisen as we have debated the Bill. I know that right hon. and hon. Members will have heard me say this at each stage of the Bill, but I would like to emphasise that this is clearly an important piece of legislation. It brings the law on reserves up to date, and it will permit those reserves to be used more flexibly.

A principal expression of that flexibility is in the call-out powers. The Bill retains the existing power of call-out in times of national danger or great emergency, and extends the power when war-like operations are in preparation or progress to all reserve forces. The Bill introduces a new power of call-out for peacekeeping, humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

The Bill removes all existing statutory stipulations that one element of the reserves be used before another. A similar restriction in TA regulations stemming from an undertaking in a 1965 White Paper will also be removed. The Bill has received widespread support, and quite rightly so. The comments from Members on both sides of the House and the favourable response from around the nation indicate that the extensive consultation exercise that was undertaken was extremely worth while. The consultation has permitted the Bill's provisions to be widely debated. The House will acknowledge that that has contributed in no small way to its smooth passage during its proper and careful scrutiny in Parliament.

I express my sincere thanks, and those of the Territorial Army and all the reserve forces, to all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate on the Bill. I extend particular thanks to the Opposition spokesmen for the sensible and coherent way in which they have sought to probe the Government's intentions. They have been fair and honourable throughout and, for my part, I have greatly enjoyed conducting the Bill in that spirit. I know that their efforts have always centred on improving the Bill and representing the interests of those affected by it.

I thank the officers and staff of all three services, who have devoted much time to legislation that will be important to them. I thank the Bill team at the Ministry of Defence and my private office for their forbearance and skill. It is not generally known, but the Ministry of Defence rarely has to introduce legislation—normally, it is only once every five years. It is my very bad luck that in my second year as Minister, muggins should have fallen in with two Bills. I am pleased that this Third Reading pulls down the curtain on an interesting and eventful Bill. However, I have had enough of it and I am glad to move on to other pastures.

I am truly grateful for the wide support that the Bill has received. Hon. Members have shown that they recognise its importance. New legislation for the reserve forces is long overdue and will be widely welcomed by all those affected. We are committed to using our reserves more flexibly. The Bill makes that possible and introduces important safeguards for employers and reservists.

In conclusion, I acknowledge the vital role that the reserve forces play in our defence capability. As we know from their work in Bosnia, they provide vital support to our Regular forces in the most difficult times as well as on an everyday basis. The House will want to join me in paying tribute to the commitment and dedication of the men and women who make up our reserve forces. They do it wholly voluntarily and are a credit to their nation and a beacon to the communities in which they serve. I know that they are waiting to take up the new challenges and opportunities that the Bill offers. I warmly commend the Bill.

5.31 pm

Mr. Murphy: I add the Opposition's congratulations to those who have been involved in passage of the Bill, which could be regarded as an example of a better way in which to deal with Bills—especially non-controversial ones.

The consultation was the most extensive on a Bill for many a year. It is perhaps time that the Government listened to what people—in this case in the reserve forces—say about legislation. The consultation has created a consensus on the main issues involved and on the principles that underlie the Bill. Despite that, there was proper and thorough scrutiny both in the other place and in Committee.

The Committee stage was short but thorough. We dealt with several important issues that require brief mention. We considered safeguards for employers and employees, especially for when people are called up, and in respect of pensions and benefits. It was important that we considered financial compensation for people who were called up. The experience of the Gulf war was less than happy and we had to cut out unnecessary bureaucracy and delay. The Ministry of Defence is now aware of that important message, as are the reserve forces.

We considered the level of permanent staff, which needs to be monitored carefully. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) mentioned the concern about extending military law. Hon. Members raised the vital issue of possible discrimination against reservists, on which the Committee spent much time. We were grateful for the Minister's reassurance on that. It must be emphasised and repeated that we can have no truck with those who discriminate against men and women who seek to serve their country as members of the reserve forces.

[Mr. Murphy]

We discussed the role of the Royal Marines Reserve, which is especially important to hon. Members who represent constituencies near the sea. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North raised the question of the Ministry of Defence police and I asked about the Maritime Voluntary Service. All those important matters were discussed at great length but with great interest in Committee.

It is important that there should be a greater link between the Regular and reserve forces, especially in respect of training. That should include the use of Regular forces' facilities when they are not in use at weekends. I hope that the Minister will consider that link. There is a training deficiency that must be addressed.

Some people have argued that the widening of the role of our reserve forces is defence on the cheap. I do not share that view, but any Government should heed the warning. The reserve forces should enhance and complement our Regular forces. We have considered at length the new category of high-readiness reserves. They illustrate graphically how our country and its armed forces are likely to play a new role in the next century. As a member of the United Nations Security Council and a leading member of NATO—the cornerstone of our defence—we will take part increasingly in humanitarian and peacekeeping exercises, as is right and proper, to ensure that our world is a better and safer place. The reserve forces will play their part in that.

The defence and security of our country and of the world should be a matter for consensus among the parties. We should all pay our warmest tribute to the men and women of our reserve forces in the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. As the Minister said, they are the link between our local communities and the armed forces.

When a Royal Artillery Territorial Army unit in my valley was forced to move because of reorganisation some years ago, the whole community—led by me and the mayor of my borough—protested because of the work that the Gunners had done for local charities and the affection and esteem in which those men and women were held. That was not untypical. Across the country, there are examples of how the Territorial Army, the Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Auxiliary Air Force boost the link between the armed forces and local communities. That link has inevitably declined because we no longer have national service and because people who served in the second world war have died.

We look forward to the Bill receiving Royal Assent. All Labour Members wish our reserve forces well.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.38 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Commonwealth Development Corporation, or the CDC as we all know it, is a success story. The purpose of the Bill is to build on that success and to give it the powers that it needs to continue its work in promoting sustainable development. The CDC's fundamental objective, as established by statute, is to contribute to the economic development of poorer countries. Everything that it does, and will do in future, must contribute to that single purpose. In so doing, it makes a valuable and distinctive contribution to Britain's overseas development effort. In particular, it is our main instrument in promoting private sector development in support of economic reform and in enhancing productive capacity—two of the key aims of the United Kingdom aid programme.

The CDC's achievements are familiar to right hon. and hon. Members and it has won many friends and supporters by its excellent record since it was established in 1948. It has won many more friends overseas in countries where its investments have made a tangible difference to the lives of local people.

The CDC's annual report and accounts for 1995 were recently laid before the House. They confirmed the growing contribution that the corporation is making to poor countries. It has comfortably beaten the strategic targets that were set in the 1993 quinquennial review. It was agreed with Ministers that 70 per cent. of board approvals for new investments should be in the poorest countries. In 1995, the CDC achieved 90 per cent. Of those, 47 per cent.—representing about £153 million—were in sub-Saharan Africa and 47 per cent. of approvals were in the form of equity or quasi-equity against a target of 25 per cent. The CDC was asked to make an 8 per cent. return on capital employed and in 1995 it achieved 9 per cent. Overall, new investments were at a record high of £276 million—an increase of 15 per cent. It may also interest the House to know that around 30 per cent. of the total portfolio is currently invested in the public sector and 40 per cent. of that is invested in power and water.

As I have said, the CDC continues to achieve its return on capital employed targets. The returns provide resources that the CDC recycles into new investments. Just last month, the CDC announced the sale of the BAL plantation in east Malaysia for about £98 million equivalent—an example of selling mature investments to local interests to raise funds for reinvestment in other development projects worldwide. At the end of 1995, the CDC had investments—before provisions—totalling £1.487 billion in a global spread of 50 countries.

I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that those statistics are impressive, although they do not guarantee the developmental effectiveness of the CDC's operations. To gauge that, I shall explain briefly how the CDC achieves development impact and adds value to its investments.

The CDC promotes growth by investing in, and supporting, the operations of commercially viable and developmentally sound business enterprises. First and

foremost, the CDC creates economic value in developing countries. That is tested not only by its profitability, but by measuring the economic rate of return of its projects.

In undertaking those activities, the CDC is committed to ensuring that the environmental policies of the businesses that it supports accord with internationally accepted standards. In its own managed projects, which directly employ some 44,000 people, a range of education and health benefits are also provided for the local community.

The CDC is a hands-on investor. It exists to add value to an enterprise, typically by providing longer-term finance than is available on the commercial markets, improving the design and structuring of investment proposals, contributing management expertise and moderating risk in countries that normally attract only a small proportion of private flows. By such means, the CDC has a powerful catalytic effect. In 1995, a total of £1.7 billion was committed alongside the CDC's commitment to produce a ratio of 1:6 of CDC funds to those of other investors.

That brings me to the proposals in the Bill. The most recent review of the CDC highlighted a number of constraints preventing more active participation by the CDC in sustainable development overseas. The Bill is particularly relevant to ensuring the success of the Commonwealth private investment initiative, in which the CDC has agreed to take a leading role. That initiative by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth was warmly welcomed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference at Auckland last year. The CPII has the potential to benefit many poorer Commonwealth countries by mobilising investment from within member states.

The first phase of the initiative—the Commonwealth Africa investment fund—will focus on sub-Saharan Africa. It is expected that it will formally be launched in July and should be ready to start at the time of the meeting of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers later this year. The initial capital target for the fund will be $75 million, of which the CDC will provide $25 million.

I am delighted to say that the fund has attracted a particularly positive response from Governments and Government agencies in south-east Asia and southern Africa. Prominent representatives from the international business and financial sectors have agreed to serve as independent directors. Following the launch, it will be the CDC's intention to bring in other institutional investors from the major financial centres of the world, thus mobilising long-term, private-sector funds that are not otherwise available to sub-Saharan Africa.

The CDC will be the fund manager—a role that it is uniquely well placed to perform, with its long experience and network of offices in sub-Saharan Africa. If it is to play a full part in the funds investment activities, however, it will need enlarged powers. The focus of the fund will be on finance for the start-up, expansion and restructuring of business in a wide range of sectors and there is expected to be particular emphasis on rehabilitation and restructuring. Without new powers, the CDC would be placed in the invidious position of being unable fully to participate in the activities of the fund. That could seriously undermine the long-term development of that important Commonwealth initiative, as I shall explain in a moment.

Hon. Members may find it helpful if I outline briefly what are inevitably somewhat technical provisions, the substance of which is within clause 1. At present, the CDC is empowered to promote or expand new or existing enterprises. Accordingly, the CDC's funds are applied primarily to creating new or additional assets or capacity. That is, and will remain, central to the CDC's work, but it undoubtedly significantly limits the CDC in assisting host Governments and major businesses which wish to divest themselves of, or rehabilitate, enterprises where change of ownership is a necessary preliminary step to regeneration.

Frequently, the change of ownership and the consequential changes of management are vital to transforming the enterprise for the benefit of the economy. Increasing numbers of Governments recognise the need to reorganise and rationalise existing enterprises that are usually under-performing and that they perceive would have a more successful future in the private sector. The Bill addresses that need in developing countries and would allow the CDC to play its full part in the development process.

The limitations imposed by the CDC's existing powers have been evident for some time. For example, the CDC has been unable to participate in a number of worthwhile projects in southern Africa because they would involve reorganisation rather than immediate expansion.

The development of effective money and capital markets in developing countries is imperative if business is to have access to finance and savers to investment opportunities. They are important for the efficient allocation of funds into productive investment, but the CDC is just as constrained here as in the other activities to which I have referred by the statutory requirement to assist only in creating new or additional capacity. For example, the CDC should be able to provide the initial investment in country or sector funds leading to larger private sector investment in due course, to manage such funds and to encourage the formation of stock or securities exchanges or dealings mechanisms. By those means, the CDC could become more involved in improving financial services that are important to economic growth.

Under existing powers, the CDC is already setting up and frequently managing investment funds to assist small and medium enterprises, particularly in Africa, but the new power will give it greater ability to invest in a wider range of funds.

In case there is any doubt in anyone's mind, I stress that the CDC has no ambitions to become a bank; nor is it looking for quick and easy returns on its investments. The CDC will continue to focus on poorer countries. As I have said, the CDC is a hands-on investor and it wishes to promote successful funds that will attract private capital. The powers that I have described are part of the normal armoury of the International Finance Corporation and other development institutions. It is right that they should also be available to the CDC, as its overriding purpose is to assist the development of the economies of host countries.

The third change proposed in clause 1 relates to so-called "dry" consultancies that are not linked to the provision of CDC finance or management services. The corporation's ability to share its considerable knowledge and expertise through consultancy services is currently

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

limited to those projects where it has an interest, or in which it is expected to participate. However, the expertise that the CDC has gained from its core activities should occasionally be made available without that link. That is a logical extension of the CDC's current activities: the CDC would not compete for contracts with the private sector or develop an extensive consultancy capacity, but merely use its specialist skills for the benefit of others on a full cost-recovery basis.

I repeat that we do not intend to change the character or the fundamental purpose of the CDC. It will remain a public sector body which will continue to operate within the strategic framework of controls agreed with Ministers. Key operational targets were set in the context of the 1993 quinquennial review and the CDC's performance against those targets is regularly monitored and reviewed. As I have said, the CDC enjoyed a most successful year in 1995. It achieved that success by directing its efforts squarely at poorer recipient countries in regions of the world where it has acquired much expertise over the years and where it is a widely respected partner.

Those fundamentals will not change if the Bill passes into law. There will be no radical, overwhelming departure from present practice. We shall see instead a careful and logical extension of the corporation's existing role, which will allow the CDC to take advantage of new and better ways of solving the old problems of poverty and deprivation. The Bill will assist the CDC to continue its fine work, which I know commands support among all parties. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.52 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): This is the third Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill to come before the House in 14 months and, on each occasion, we have enjoyed the unusual experience of agreeing about something—at least initially. As the Minister said, the CDC should be congratulated on its successes: its financial performance, its attainment of agreed targets and, above all, its continuing important contribution to the strengthening of economies in some of the world's poorest countries.

However, we part company over the question of future plans for the CDC. The Labour party believes firmly that the CDC has a distinct and expanding future role to play within a Government-directed overseas aid programme. I am not sure that the Government hold a similar view—sometimes I am not convinced that they have thought about the CDC in the longer term, although the Minister's comments have reassured me a little. I look forward to further illumination in the winding-up speech regarding several issues that I shall raise during the debate.

The CDC makes a vital contribution to the United Kingdom's development programme. It pump primes private investment in some of the world's poorest countries, reaching the countries that other investment organisations will not even consider. Its activities are complementary to the Overseas Development Administration's efforts to provide bilateral and multilateral development assistance through Governments and non-governmental organisations and in partnership with international institutions such as the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union.

Against the background of a steadily declining aid budget, Ministers may point to increasing flows of private investment to the developing world; but where are those market-driven private funds headed? They flow not to south Asia or to sub-Saharan Africa but mainly to a very narrow band of middle-income countries in east Asia and in Latin America.

In 1994, 90 per cent. of private investment went to just 10 developing countries. Private capital flows to sub-Saharan Africa have amounted to less than 2 per cent. of the developing total since 1993. According to World bank figures, in 1992 to 1994, only 1 per cent. of private capital flows went to the most severely indebted countries. In 1993-94, 19 per cent. of the CDC's investments were in projects based in those severely indebted countries. Not only does the CDC target some of the poorest countries, but its investments are medium to long term and offer much needed economic stability.

The globalisation of the economy poses yet another threat to poor nations, widening still further the gap between the debt-ridden and the middle-income countries. That is why the CDC is, and will continue to be, an important tool in the delivery of development assistance in partnership with the private sector. We believe that properly managed, directed and focused private investment will play a key part in future development programmes under a Labour Government.

The CDC has carefully carved out its own market over the years. A CDC board member, Sir William Ryrie, writing in his organisation's magazine in December 1995, said:

> "It is not our role to finance companies which do not need our help and can raise the funding they need themselves—that is a waste of our resources. This would seem to leave only a narrow area for us to operate in, avoiding on the one hand unwise investments, which no-one should undertake, and on the other those which the markets will finance without our help".

However, the channel is not narrow. Sir William went on to recognise that most developing countries have a long way to go in cultivating their own capital markets. The CDC's role is assured well into the future.

Against that background, I welcome the Minister's assurances this evening that the CDC will remain in the public sector and that the widening of the CDC's powers as proposed in the Bill is not a prelude to privatisation. I ask him to reiterate the statement made by the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), on 3 May 1994 that the CDC would stay in the public sector because it was generally felt that privatisation of the CDC would result in a financial structure, aims and objectives that were inconsistent with its development role. I share that view.

In my opening remarks, I referred to previous Bills that had come before the House. Concern about the Government's plans for the CDC undermined Labour Members' confidence that proposed new powers would not signal either a CDC sell-off or a noticeable shift in market focus away from the poorest countries and towards emerging markets in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. The way in which the Government chose to present the Bills did nothing either to speed or to smooth their passage.

The first Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, which was presented last March, was quite straightforward. However, it was swiftly followed by a

private Member's Bill originating in another place which we were assured was absolutely essential to the continuing success of the CDC. In that case, why was it not a Government Bill? If the new powers in the Commonwealth Development Corporation (No. 2) Bill—which are largely presented again in the current legislation—were so significant, why were they not in the first Bill? I have never understood that.

The key to CDC activity is the triggering of genuine additional investment. However, the proposed new powers to purchase equity funds did not meet that criteria automatically. We did not see why the CDC should get involved in asset trading relating to buy-out if such activity did not lead directly to new investment.

We were also worried about the reference in last year's corporate plan to a strategy aimed at targeting

"turning-point countries . . . with their higher growth potential".

No one would quarrel with the idea that it is sensible to concentrate scarce resources where the best effect can be obtained, but we were concerned that the concentration on pump-priming privatisation programmes might shunt the CDC away from the Commonwealth countries and towards emerging democracies in eastern Europe.

That is why I commented last year that the debate that we had was unfinished business. I recognise that there are immense commercial and financial opportunities with which the CDC would like to involve itself—even a cursory reading through its annual report and current corporate plan reveals that it is straining at the leash—but there is one major hitch. I quote the CDC:

"The volumes of new business forecast by Representatives are at a higher level than can be funded".

The Bill does not address that fundamental dilemma.

The CDC is therefore seeking ways to churn its assets to raise funds for new projects, and I note its intention to hasten equity realisations. The Commonwealth private investment initiative, which triggered the request for a change in legislation, is another mechanism to raise funds against a background of financial restraint by Government.

The Commonwealth private investment initiative was welcomed by the heads of Commonwealth Governments last November, and we join them in that support. They recognised, as we do, the dearth of private investment in Africa and the need for rehabilitation and rejuvenation of businesses in the continent that has suffered wars, chronic indebtedness and natural disasters for so long. In the African continent, private investment has concentrated on oil-producing countries, with Nigeria taking 30 per cent. of total flows. Obviously, market forces do not serve the poorest at all well.

The CDC was the obvious candidate to act as an investment catalyst, with its established reputation throughout the Commonwealth. I was delighted to note that the CDC's new business investments in sub-Saharan Africa increased from £41 million in 1994 to £154 million in 1995. We all welcome that. Against that background, we are asked to consider the Bill, which we are told is essential if the CDC is to participate fully in the operations of that new Commonwealth initiative and its first African investment fund.

Given our enthusiasm for that project, we would have liked to put our full weight behind the legislation, had it been more project specific. Why was legislation tailor made to the needs of the CDC in relation to the Commonwealth initiative not forthcoming, and why has the Overseas Development Administration fallen back on resurrecting much of the Commonwealth Development Corporation (No. 2) Bill from last year? Surely it cannot be for lack of drafting time. Such a move would have resulted in the enthusiastic cross-party endorsement that it warrants.

The new powers proposed in the Bill will impact on all the CDC's activities, not only within the limits of the new initiative. Once again, the privatisation fear is raised.

Mr. Hanley *indicated dissent.*

Miss Lestor: I know that the Minister has said—he shakes his head again—that there is no such fear, and I welcome that. Will he assure the House that the new powers will be applied to the CDC's activities only in the operation of the Commonwealth initiative? An alternative interpretation is that the Government have no plan for the future of the CDC—an organisation operating in a commercial environment, under Government constraints, yet remaining in the private sector. There is some confusion in that regard.

In Government, the Labour party will look forward to a long and successful relationship with the CDC—similar to that which a previous Government had. I welcome the emphasis in its current annual report on the development impact of its projects and on the need for assessments of their impact on the environment and of health and safety. I hope that the CDC will add workers' rights to that list. I also want stronger development input at board level. Would the CDC really miss one of the many bankers in situ if he were replaced by a development expert?

Earlier, I mentioned the Government's failure in the Bill to address the crucial issue of how the CDC is funded. There should be a review of the orthodox policy towards the CDC funding, and specifically a re-examination of the policies that prevent the CDC having access to private sector funding.

The CDC's current main method of funding new investments is to generate financial surpluses. The French attitude is different. Electricité de France, the state-owned power company, derives all its borrowing from the private sector. Perhaps the Bill, too, is unfinished business. Only time will tell.

In conclusion, the Opposition wish the CDC and the CPII regional development fund initiative well, although we deeply regret the rather shoddy way in which the initiative and the CDC have been treated by the Government, and we look forward to a not-too-distant time when a more transparent, constructive and supportive partnership can be established.

6.5 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I shall be brief.

We are great admirers of the Commonwealth Development Corporation and I pay tribute to it. For many years—ever since my ministerial days—I have been deeply impressed by its work.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), I shall pose a question arising from the fact that, for the third time in 14 months, we are discussing a

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

piece of legislation relating to the CDC. We seek from the Minister, when he replies, at least an assurance that the CDC now has all the powers that it needs to fulfil the tasks that it wishes to undertake. We had the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1995, and now we have this Bill. Like my hon. Friend, I do not understand why those two Bills could not have been brought together as one package. Having accepted that those additional powers are needed, I ask the Minister: are the two Bills the final instalment of the CDC's legislative requirements to carry out its work, or has it made outstanding requests for legislation? We should at least be told that.

I ask the Minister and my hon. Friends to consider the CDC's role in the context of a much more imaginative view of our relationships with the Commonwealth and of relationships within it. I draw attention to the report on the future role of the Commonwealth which I, as a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, helped to prepare and write. One of the most astonishing aspects of our work in preparing the report was that all the members of the Select Committee were struck by the changing character and potential of the Commonwealth—and no more so than in commercial and economic relations. Contrary to the image that many people may have of the Commonwealth as an organisation living on sentiment and past attachments, we discovered that the Commonwealth had a very important modern role in economic, commercial and aid terms.

We felt, as we said in our report, that the CDC had a vital role in developing what we considered to be the new networking possibilities of the modern Commonwealth, as opposed to old and sentimental attachments and ties. I hope that the Minister will ponder on our observations about the role that the CDC might play in bringing to fruition some of our ideas and our vision.

I draw the attention of the Minister and of the House to paragraphs 56 to 58 of our report where, in the context of the Commonwealth as an economic forum, we drew attention to the fact that contacts between that enormous network of countries are facilitated by the fact that a common heritage has resulted in the development of similar legal systems, accountancy procedures and business practice—and, of course, a widespread understanding of the English language.

The traditional relationships within the Commonwealth have enormous economic and commercial potential. While we have turned our backs on Commonwealth and imperial preferences in the context of our membership of the European Union, new opportunities, new connections and new networking can be achieved in developing economic and commercial relationships between Commonwealth countries. Paragraph 58 points out that

"there is scope for the Commonwealth to act as a broking house for mutual interaction, both on a multilateral and bilateral basis."

The CDC has a crucial and central role in the development of new ties within the Commonwealth, as opposed to the traditional Commonwealth ties. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office presented evidence to the Committee, but we believe that it does not realise the new potential. Some of the richest and fastest growing countries are in the Commonwealth, as are some of the poorest countries. In terms of gross national product per capita, Singapore is at the top of the list and Mozambique—the most recent country to join the Commonwealth—is at the bottom.

There has been a fantastic level of growth in many of the Asian Commonwealth countries. We believe that that experience could be utilised, through the Commonwealth network, to assist the poorer countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa. The Committee therefore made a series of recommendations in relation to bridging the gap between the richest and poorest Commonwealth countries. We decided that we should not have a United Kingdom-centred view of the Commonwealth, but that we should look at the network of relationships that exist between other Commonwealth countries.

I ask the Minister and the CDC to look at the role of the CDC. It may be able to play an even greater part in the criss-cross of relationships that exist, or could exist, in the Commonwealth within an economic and commercial forum. I draw the Minister's attention to paragraphs 93 and 94 of the report as they are directly related to the role of the CDC. In paragraph 94 the Committee draws attention to the fact that the CDC told us that it was being under-utilised and expressed concern about future pressure on the bilateral aid budget which might cause it to reduce its activities.

On this occasion, I do not want to raise the relationship between the CDC's programme and our aid programme. Changes have occurred in our aid programme, particularly in our bilateral aid programme, and it appears that in the next year or so our bilateral aid programme will be smaller than the contributions that we make to the European Union aid budget, which will have considerable rippling effects on the operation of the CDC. As I have said, the CDC believes that it is being under-utilised. The recommendation contained in paragraph 94 states:

"We commend the work and potential of the CDC. We recommend that the Government examines the case for it to play a greater role in investment in developing Commonwealth countries, thus giving greater weight to the investment component of the bilateral aid programme."

I ask the Minister whether, in the context of the Bill, the CDC will be able to play a greater role in the Commonwealth, as the Select Committee envisaged. We believe that economic and commercial networking has tremendous potential within the Commonwealth. For example, we could link the incredible experiences of the growth economies of Singapore and Malaysia with the experiences of the poorer, sub-Saharan economies. It is sad that while some developing countries in the Commonwealth have taken off in a variety of ways, others have been left behind. Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as a classic illustration of this—in terms of GNP per capita and every other form of assessment of poverty and need.

Is it not possible somehow to bridge the gap? The experiences and know-how of the growing Asian economies could help sub-Saharan Africa. The CDC could play an important bridging role in passing on that experience. It could borrow and utilise the knowledge and understanding of the successful developing economies in the Commonwealth and link them with the countries that are least successful. That was one of the great themes of the Committee's report—that there are new and novel ways in which the Commonwealth could be networked. A Eurocentric view of society and the world misses these other visions and opportunities. There are also market opportunities for the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

I hope that the Minister will reassure me as to the type of role that the Commonwealth can play at the end of the century—which would be different from the role that it played in the first part of the century. The CDC could be an important bridge and link in relation to these new experiences. It could cross-fertilise the experiences between the economies within the Commonwealth. The United Kingdom does not necessarily have the experience of some of the growing Asian economies. That experience would be of enormous value for the sub-Saharan economies and could help to lift the economies, welfare and prosperity of some of the poorest countries within the Commonwealth.

6.16 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and West Devon): It is a pleasure to welcome the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill.

It was sad last year when the Bill fell due to Government lack of time—indeed, the minuscule debate on the CDC gave no indication of the extent of its work. The Government appeared to be ignoring the CDC. I am glad that the Minister of State has put that right today. The Bill is particularly interesting because it focuses on the title of the organisation, and the words "development" and "Commonwealth". Commonwealth Development Corporation investment has been expanded to accommodate the widening boundaries of the Commonwealth of nations and to invest in countries which are not part of that grouping.

The definition of "development" was also constrained. In the past, the CDC was constrained by its stated object of development, which was rightly interpreted as new physical assets. This has been a hindrance to real development in the sense of investing in privatisation and in management rehabilitation projects. Without new assets, that would have been against the letter of the law.

The Bill replaces the words "promotion and expansion" with the words "creation, promotion, expansion, reorganisation or rationalisation", which widens the definition of "development" and allows the CDC to invest in the Africa fund. For all the commendations that the fund has received in the debate, it seems to be somewhat modest.

This is a welcome beginning, which gives us the chance to congratulate the CDC's staff and governors on achieving sound economic development in many countries. This is a model of how to approach the development challenge. It improves management expertise and it improves and creates capital flows to make valuable sustainable businesses in the countries involved. The CDC offers a highly professional valued-added and results-based approach.

The Minister has talked about the magnificent way in which the CDC works in so many different countries. I should like to pay tribute to the staff, who work in some very difficult situations. It is so easy, with this excellent annual report, to expect the CDC's achievements, but let us not forget that its staff work in very difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. I was in Papua New Guinea with a regional director, for example, watching some of the work that is being done across that country. A couple of days after I left, the manager, Carl Edwards, was killed by one of the local people, who had mistaken something that had been done. We perhaps understate, in a typically old-fashioned British manner, the dangers, difficulties and strains that CDC staff face every day in so many places internationally.

It is welcome to be able to comment positively on the targeting of resources in developing countries in the sub-Saharan countries of the Commonwealth, which are particularly poor. The importance of that region has already been recognised and commented on in this debate. The fact is that 47 per cent. of the CDC's worldwide investment approvals made last year relate to that area. It is good to know that business has increased from £41 million, in 1994, to £157 million, in 1995, and that new offices have opened in Mozambique and Uganda.

It is excellent that this Bill will enable the CDC to continue such good work in the more needy countries of sub-Saharan Africa. I particularly welcome—I questioned the Minister about it a week ago—the opening up of the possibility of investment in South Africa, where funds to enable franchise operations for disadvantaged groups will assist nation building.

It has been very interesting to find how well the CDC can perform with such various investments. Figures with which we have been provided show that Zambia Sugar now has a 34 per cent. input from the CDC. Contrast that with the CDC's 2 per cent. investment holding in Sakthi Sugar, which I perceived in operation in southern India. It was a very interesting exercise to have the opportunity to see some of the CDC's work in a number of different countries.

I welcome the Bill from the Liberal Bench. The Bill will allow the CDC to fulfil its role in assisting development even more than it has already done. Perhaps the only downside to the Bill is that it reminds the House that, for the past eight years, the CDC wanted to facilitate better management and investment—not only in the new or expanded projects that it has been able to undertake, but also of existing assets, such as selling off state-owned agricultural assets in sub-Saharan Africa. Such projects offers great potential.

It is good to know that the CDC no longer turns aside from activities that it has wished to do for so long, when it needed to concentrate solely on new development. It can now assist in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of such promising sectors. I welcome the Bill.

6.22 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on the importance of the Commonwealth and on the creative role that the Commonwealth Development Corporation has played and can potentially play.

My first comment on the Commonwealth should be to say that my family originate from a Commonwealth country, Jamaica, and that my constituency of Hackney has quite a sizeable community of people who originate from across the Commonwealth.

I notice that in many ways, as we approach the millennium, people in the Commonwealth countries value the Commonwealth link rather more than do the British people. I would not miss an opportunity to speak in the House about the Commonwealth and to stress the fact, for the benefit of hon. Members and of those who read the record of our proceedings, that the Commonwealth link and its potential are very much undervalued by public opinion.

[Ms Diane Abbott]

The Commonwealth fell into disrepute in the 1980s because of some of the tussles that Britain had with other Commonwealth countries, on issues such as South Africa, when it became commonplace to read rather disparaging comments and articles about the Commonwealth in the tabloid press.

The Commonwealth is a great underused asset in Britain's relationship with the world. The first reason why it is an underused asset was mentioned earlier in this debate: some of the strongest and fastest developing economies in the world, such as the Asian tiger countries, are in the Commonwealth. It would be foolish for the British public and British politicians to ignore the tremendous economic and development potential of Commonwealth links with some of the strongest economies, such as Singapore, because of tussles and struggles in the 1980s over certain matters.

The Commonwealth's other merit is that it is unique. In an increasingly divided world—with the rise of refugees and migration, where people are increasingly fearful of each other—it is a club in which black, white, Asian and Muslim nations join in a genuine family of nations. International politics are too often ruled by fear and by threat, and an international club in which nations that vary widely in cultural and religious origins can come together is a tremendous force for good.

I can remember how, in the Commonwealth of the 1980s, the most unlikely alliances sprang up—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I have been able to resist intervening on the hon. Lady's speech so far, but I remind her that this is a debate on Second Reading of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill. Although an introduction is entirely in order, perhaps the hon. Lady will now deal with the Bill.

Ms Abbott: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One of the reasons why the Bill is so important is that it will strengthen the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has been responsible for the emergence of many creative international alliances, such as that in the 1980s between Canada, under Pierre Trudeau, and Jamaica, under Michael Manley. Those alliances would never have emerged without the context of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is an underused resource, and the CDC will help this country to maximise and strengthen its links within the Commonwealth. Another important aspect of the Commonwealth, which touches centrally on the Bill, is that we have seen, sadly, in many of the international financial institutions—such as the International Monetary Fund and the World bank—a redirection of monetary flows away from Africa and from some of the poorest countries towards eastern Europe and Russia. I believe that the CDC has the potential to ensure that some of the poorest countries, which happen also to be Commonwealth countries, receive their share of investment and attention.

Once again, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about the importance of the Commonwealth link. To the extent that the CDC will help to build and develop those links, much of the Bill's contents is very much to be welcomed.

6.27 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): This has been a short, but very well-informed and good-natured, debate. I hope that Conservative Members do not now say, "Up till now." I must say that I found the Minister's speech almost statesmanlike—

Ms Abbott: No; never.

Mr. Foulkes: Well, almost statesmanlike. As he was speaking, I think that he was almost revelling in the fact that he is the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and no longer the chairman of the Conservative party, given today's scandal over the financing of the Conservative party by friends of Radovan Karadzic. I can see that he is on much safer ground with the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill.

The debate has been graced by the presence of hon. Members who know a great deal about the Commonwealth—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who was for a long time a very distinguished Minister of State for Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs. Indeed, when I was a shadow foreign affairs Minister and visited countries in the Caribbean and central America, the first question I was asked was, "How is Ted Rowlands keeping?" I was able to reassure them. Even though my hon. Friend's distinguished service took place some years ago, he is still a relatively young man in the context of the House. Indeed, my hon. Friend has a great deal to give the House in future. He has a special role now in the work of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and I was glad that he brought the discussions and debates of that Committee to the notice of the House. My hon. Friend talked about the new role of the Commonwealth, which is an essential part of the developing role of the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

I liked the way in which my hon. Friend spoke about networking and a broking house for Commonwealth countries, with multilateral and bilateral contacts. No longer is the United Kingdom the spider at the centre of the web; it is an equal partner.

I am glad to see that the Government Whip is wearing his Commonwealth Parliamentary Association United Kingdom branch tie. As treasurer of the UK branch of the CPA, I, like him, am keen to encourage the Commonwealth's role in Parliament. I am glad that that has been achieved through the CPA. I should like there to be greater co-operation between all the Commonwealth organisations, including the CPA and its sister organisations.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney will agree that the new relationship with our fellow members of the Commonwealth must not be patronising or neo-colonial in any way. There must be an equal partnership. I am glad to see the Minister nod in agreement.

Nothing that is said today should detract from the good work that is carried out by the corporation. The Minister's remarks were positive and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) praised the corporation's work, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said a great deal. The

Opposition are supportive of the corporation's contribution. It is a public corporation and it will remain even more so under the next Labour Government.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon said about the corporation's staff. Events over the past year have shown us that those who are involved in development overseas can find themselves in extremely dangerous situations. People who are not on military operations have faced kidnappings and other problems. They are on missions of mercy, not on holiday; often, they are providing help, aid and assistance, but they sometimes find themselves in extreme difficulties. I pay tribute to the work that is carried out by the corporation's staff and to the work of all those who are overseas and engaged in development work.

The purpose of the corporation is to promote economic development in the countries in which it operates. We have seen its work develop in other countries, and we must be cautious about further development. We do not want to dilute the corporation's effectiveness. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney nod in agreement.

The corporation's primary role is to provide equity and long-term loans on concessional terms to promote productive investment in the private sector. It invests about £200 million a year in developing countries. It is work that we agree with, support and encourage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles, in her usual, kind way, spoke gently about the way in which we have dealt with legislation for the corporation in this place. Other hon. Members have alluded to that. I am rather more direct about such matters. The approach has been something of a dog's breakfast, culminating in today's reintroduction of a Bill that was introduced by Lord Trefgarne last year. There has been chaos and confusion, which underlines the need for a Cabinet sub-committee to deal with development and to liaise between Departments to discuss issues that have a bearing on the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the Overseas Development Administration and other Departments.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles on successfully steering through our policy forum at Manchester over the weekend. It is now the Labour party's policy to establish a development sub-committee so that, under a Labour Government, after the next general election, we shall not have confusion over the legislation that involves the corporation.

Why were the Government unable to insert all the measures that are before us into the original Bill, which was discussed in the House and in Committee, and which could have been amended? There could have been an overall, rather than a piecemeal examination of its operations.

The Government's record in other areas makes us suspicious. That is why we have been worried about their real intentions. I understand that there has been some in-fighting between the Treasury and the Foreign Office over the original Bill. I know also that that created some problems. Bearing in mind, however, what has crept in, we have a right to be suspicious.

We are still suspicious of the rationale and the implications that lie behind the Bill, but we have no hesitation in welcoming the introduction of the Commonwealth private investment initiative. During the Government's dying months, however, we want to be kept fully informed of developments. When the Labour Government take office after the next election, the House will receive an annual report. It is—*[Interruption.]* Some Conservative Members laugh. I am glad to give them some amusement.

Conservative Members should have been with me this morning in Dunfermline to witness the pathetic performance of the Secretary of State for Social Security at the Scottish Grand Committee. They would have seen the Government on their last legs. Indeed, some Ministers are on the chicken run because their majorities are smaller than 10,000. They know that they are on the way out. I am not indulging in fantasy, and none of my right hon. and hon. Friends is complacent.

Miss Lestor: It is hysteria.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend understands the hysteria of Conservative Members. It is—*[Interruption.]* I thought that I might stir up some Conservative Members.

We are worried about "unshackled", a word that has been used by Ministers. It has been used in the context of the corporation. In other contexts, it is a euphemism for the removal from the state sector of an effective tranche of public sector finance, which finds its way instead into the hands of financial vultures who make a quick killing at other people's expense.

I reiterate the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles. We want the Minister to give us some assurances that the financial vultures will not benefit in this instance. The Minister has told us that the Government do not want the corporation to be yet another bank, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said, the membership of the corporation's board is similar to the membership of a bank's board. Will the Minister tell us something about the board's membership? We have had some discussion with the present board members and with Baroness Chalker about getting on the board people who are especially interested in development. I would appreciate some assurance from the Minister this evening.

I want also to emphasise something my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said. We firmly believe that the CDC has a distinct and expanding role to play in a Government-directed overseas aid programme. That is why we have had some discussions with the CDC about the role that it will play under the next Labour Government. As my hon. Friend said, we will continue those discussions to see how we can develop the role of the CDC positively to help the development of the countries concerned.

From our discussions with CDC members, we have gathered that it will continue to build on the good work that it has undertaken over the years. However, the need for the Government to retain a close interest in the way in which public bodies operate must always remain. I hope that the Minister can give an assurance when he replies this evening that the Government and the ODA will work closely with the CDC and continue to take an active part in the future. The passage of the Bill should not be a signal for any kind of disengagement by the ODA from the oversight of and co-operation with the work of the CDC.

The Opposition are worried about the dangers of progress towards privatisation, because we have seen that happen to other organisations. Indeed, the water quangos

[Mr. Foulkes]

have not been privatised yet in Scotland but if, heaven forbid, another Tory Government were elected, they would be ripe for privatisation. I notice that the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is nodding. He obviously agrees that if another Tory Government were elected, that is exactly what would happen. We are worried that the Government might be testing the waters for fattening the company and selling it off, so it would be helpful and reassuring for all those involved in development if the Minister were to give an assurance that the Government do not intend to move in that direction. If I am more sceptical than some of my hon. Friends, it is through experience.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said, the Labour party accepts that the private sector has an important part to play in development. We have never denied that. We want a genuinely indigenous private sector, not a dependent private sector. We must ensure that capital flows remain in the developing world and are not siphoned away from the developing world so that it becomes increasingly dependent on foreign investment. Such a scenario can be envisaged if the financial managers and City fly-boys prevail over the genuine managers and those involved in development who have experience of running businesses in the developing world. We expressed that concern last year in similar debates on the CDC. The CDC has been very thorough in its briefings to us and it has assured us that the hands-on element that has served it well over the years will not be lost to the excesses of privatisation and the financial markets.

The CDC has, carefully, found a niche for itself in promoting investment over the years. Both the Opposition and the Government have acknowledged that this evening. Attempts to move into areas run by bigger fish—other organisations that are doing a good job—would be a dereliction of the CDC's duty to its original purpose and its current role. I hope that that role will be assured into the future. Any change would inevitably result in the CDC having to compete on terms that are not favourable to the enhancement of the developing world.

I cannot understand why, despite repeated requests by the Labour party, a Bill that would allow projects such as the Commonwealth private investment initiative, but would not give the CDC powers as wide as are proposed today, could not have been drafted quickly to avoid wasting parliamentary time. The Labour party is going along with the extension of powers today, but we need assurances from the Minister. We are going along with the Bill because of the enthusiastic support given by Commonwealth countries, through their high commissioners and directly, to the CPII.

I hope that the Minister can reassure us on the points that have been raised in today's debate. While we have reservations about the extent to which the CDC will be given freedoms by the Bill and the fact that the Government have lessened its role in the future, we wish it every success in the CPII.

Development for countries, especially in Africa, must be appropriate to their needs, and should be without exploitation. It is important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, to recognise the new role of the Commonwealth. We do not accept that the physical colonialism of the past should be replaced by financial colonialism. With those reservations, we are prepared to go along with the Second Reading of the Bill this evening.

6.45 pm

Mr. Hanley: We have had a useful and interesting debate on the Bill. I expected there to be support from both sides of the House for the work of the CDC and I was not disappointed. Hon. Members have raised a number of points and I wish to deal with them.

The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) mentioned that few resources go to the poorest countries. I have to admit that private sector flows are low, but they have increased significantly recently. The flows concentrate on a small number of middle-income countries, mostly Latin America and east Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia account for 30 per cent. of the world's population, but attracted only 2 per cent. and 4 per cent. respectively of private sector money in 1992-94. During that period, however, the CDC invested 50 per cent. of its investments in those areas, which augments the private flows.

The hon. Members for Eccles and for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) mentioned privatisation of the CDC. Following the last quinquennial review, it was confirmed to the House in May 1994 that the CDC was being retained in the public sector, and that remains the Government's belief. I am happy to confirm that the present position—in which the CDC is a public corporation run by the board in a framework of targets agreed with Ministers—is the right one.

Much has been said about why the new powers were not included in the original Bill. After what became the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1995 had been introduced last year, we concluded that we could not add measures to it within the long title. That is why Lord Trefgarne introduced a private Member's Bill in the other place. Two hon. Members stated that that Bill failed because of lack of Government time, but it failed because of a mistake by Labour Front Benchers. It is amazing how they will not apologise for having killed the Bill off and instead try to make some high-minded excuse about a matter of principle. It was not a matter of principle: it was a mistake.

Miss Emma Nicholson: The Minister may not know that I tried to speak in the CDC debate last year. I was firmly told by the Conservative Whips that the Government did not want anybody to speak from the Conservative side in favour of the CDC.

Mr. Hanley: It was not that the Government wanted no one to speak in favour of the CDC; quite the reverse. The hon. Lady might not remember, or her memory is selective. The deputy chief Whip of the Labour party objected to the Bill, rather as the Opposition objected to the Hong Kong (War Wives and Widows) Bill just 10 days ago. They did so by mistake, and I am pleased that, today, both sides of the House have recognised the wisdom of the Bill and that we have been able to put the matter straight.

Miss Lestor: There has been a feeling of agreement for much of the evening, but we did not make a mistake; it was quite deliberate. The Bill was not killed off, but

opposed, because we were not receiving the assurances that we sought about the future of the Bill and the CDC. We are receiving those assurances tonight.

Mr. Hanley: I have heard that one before. Here, at least, we have a Bill that has now worked, and we have shown that progress can be made when two or more people who are friendly towards a Bill's objective act together sensibly in the interests of those whom we are all trying to serve. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the fact that we are now discussing this Bill, and I believe that, God willing, it will be given its Third Reading as well. Let us leave the other issues to history, which is where they ought to be buried.

The hon. Lady mentioned the "poor country" target. We need to allow the CDC to play a role in countries where it usefully can, but we should also remember that the target for poor countries relates to countries eligible for International Development Association funding. The definition of a poor country involves a per capita income below $1,300 in 1992. We must allow the CDC to play a role wherever it can, but some countries may fall outside that limit.

South Africa, in particular, is not defined as a poor country for our present purposes. Other countries, such as Namibia, Botswana, Jamaica, Fiji, Belize and some small Caribbean Commonwealth islands do not fit the definition of a poor country, either, but are helped by the CDC. In all cases, the CDC targets areas and sectors that may have difficulty gaining access to other sources of finance, or helps to diversify economies. That allows some diversification of risk in the portfolio.

Mr. Rowlands: I should have interrupted the Minister earlier. Will he confirm that the Bill represents the CDC's full legislative requirement?

Mr. Hanley: Yes—and I will repeat that later, when I deal with the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

The current coverage of the CDC's activities is pretty comprehensive. We are now doing significant business in India and Pakistan; more recent additions include South Africa and Vietnam. The main driver of the CDC's country coverage is the 70 per cent. target for poor countries—as it should be, given the corporation's developmental role. That target has not changed. The CDC is not planning to divert activity to middle-income countries; on the contrary, it is no longer making new investments in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, but is extending its activities into pre-emerging countries.

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) popped into the Chamber for a few minutes. I am sorry that she missed the opening speeches from the Front Benches, and that she is now missing the answers to her questions, but I hope that her hon. Friends will point her towards the answers. She mentioned the Commmonwealth countries. The Government no longer set a formal target for investment in traditional Commonwealth countries.

Up to 1993, the target was to make two thirds of new investments in Commonwealth countries. That target was comfortably exceeded. In practice, the CDC still makes a large proportion of its new investments in Commonwealth countries—in 1995, the proportion was 71 per cent.—and it has an internal target of making not less than 30 per cent. of its new investments in sub-Saharan Africa, where there is a concentration of Commonwealth countries. In fact, it achieved 47 per cent. in 1995.

Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have been mentioned. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said that too much was going to eastern Europe. The CDC does not currently invest in eastern Europe or in the former Soviet Union, and there are no plans to ask Ministers' permission to do so. A number of other bodies, such as the European bank for reconstruction and development, already exist and have a remit to promote investment in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The CDC and the Government would need to consider carefully whether the CDC had any comparative advantage. Resourcing implications would also need to be considered.

The CDC is not currently working in Nigeria, or planning any new investment. Old projects are there on a care and maintenance basis only.

The hon. Member for Eccles suggested that there should be more development experts on the CDC board. There are currently four vacancies on the board, but I believe that the chairman and members have considerable experience of service in finance and development in various capacities. Indeed, that can be seen from the annual report. We are very grateful for the public service that they have given. The chairman recently established a sub-committee of the board specifically to review development issues, comprising the chairman himself, Professor Carruthers, Professor Faber and, I believe, Sir William Ryrie.

The board contains people with a wide range of experience, as does the proposed board of directors of the Commonwealth Africa Investment Fund, the first fund that I said would be invested in. The chairman, Mr. Pillay, is a former managing director of the Government of Singapore Investment Agency; Sam Jonah is the chief executive of Ashanti Gold Fields in Ghana; David Gill is a former senior director of IFC in Washington; David Phiri is a leading Zambian business man; Pen Kent is the executive director of the Bank of England and a banker, but a non-executive director of the CDC; and Nicholas Selbie is the managing director of CDC Investments. I am grateful to those people, and, despite what was said by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, no one could describe Sir William Ryrie, Ian Carruthers, Carolyn Hayman, Michael McWilliam, Michael Faber, Pen Kent and Russell Seal as investment fat cats.

The hon. Member for Eccles asked whether the new powers would apply only to the CPII. The powers will assist the CDC in taking part in the CPII, but there is no reason not to allow the CDC to invest directly in projects involving reconstruction that are covered by the Bill.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs for its report, and we welcome the Committee's support for the CDC. We expect the corporation to continue to play a major part in the UK development effort, both in the Commonwealth and in poorer countries. It is very successful in generating its own resources for new investments on the basis of accumulated funding from Government, and it is able to lever in substantial private sector finance. We have

[Mr. Hanley]

already discussed that. By widening the CDC's power, the Bill will allow the corporation to enhance and extend its investment activities in future.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney also asked whether the CDC had all the powers that it needed. I said that I would return to his question. The corporation has naturally been fully involved in discussions on the Bill. I was very pleased to meet Lord Cairns and the rest of the staff when I visited the corporation, and I believe that they are fully content with the range of powers that they will have, as are we. Indeed, they urged us to be speedy; what frightened them most was the possibility that the Bill might not be passed during this Session. Both they and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth have spoken of the importance of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the scope of Commonwealth co-operation. The CPII is an instrument that will involve countries such as Singapore in the development of sub-Saharan Africa, and it is therefore greatly to be welcomed.

The CDC is a well-respected organisation that deserves our support. Its services are much sought after in the developing world, where there is widespread appreciation of the quality of its investment and the real contribution that it makes to economic growth. The Bill provides for a logical extension of the CDC's existing powers, which it has used prudently and responsibly over the years. It will continue along its established path, but it is right to enable it to join its partners so that it can respond flexibly to the changing needs of poor countries. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

7 pm

Mr. Hanley: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members who have taken part in the debates and who have contributed their wisdom and experience to our consideration of this short but important Bill. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) for his knockabout pantomime act on Second Reading. We expected such from the hon. Gentleman: other contributions were more thoughtful.

We examined some key issues relating the role and achievements of the Commonwealth Development Corporation in promoting sustainable development in poor countries and, in particular, in supporting the development of the private sector. The Government presented the Bill to update and clarify the CDC's powers so that it may join its co-investors in the future and encourage the development of effective money and capital markets.

The Overseas Development Administration and the Commonwealth Development Corporation will continue to work closely together to ensure that the CDC's new powers are used to complement its existing activities within the strategic framework that has been agreed with the Government.

7.2 pm

Miss Joan Lestor: I agree with everything that the Minister has said about how the House and others have dealt with the Bill. We wish it well. I commend the Whip for his beautiful diction and I hope that he will get a better speaking part at some time in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third Time, and passed.

DEER (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL *[LORDS]* [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No.50A(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in any sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

AGRICULTURE

Ordered,

That Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Mr. Gordon Prentice be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Warren Hawksley be discharged from the Education and Employment Committee and Mr. Graham Riddick be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Sergeant Trevor Walker

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

7.3 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am pleased to have been granted this debate and that the House has reached the Adjournment at such an early hour. That will give the Minister and me due time to consider an important matter.

The debate provides an opportunity for me to bring to the House once again the vexed question of compensation for our service personnel who were injured while serving in a peacekeeping role in Bosnia—or rather, the lack of such compensation. This issue has been raised on previous occasions, and I regret that some of my speech will repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) said in his debate about his constituent, Corporal Stott, on 5 December 1994. The record of that debate is in columns 117 to 124 of the *Official Report*.

I am also aware of the attempts in 1992 by the former Member for Winchester, John Browne, and Lord Swinfen in, respectively, an Adjournment debate on 31 January 1992, which is in columns 1267 to 1274 of the *Official Report*, and in a private Member's Bill on 9 June 1992, the report of which is in the *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 1193 to 1204, to introduce the concept of no-fault compensation payments by the Ministry of Defence to injured service men.

Furthermore, I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces answered a question by hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 13 February on the issue of compensation to service men who had been injured in Bosnia. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury has told me that, as a member of the Select Committee on Defence, he is worried about that issue, as are other members of the Committee.

The common thread that runs through the three debates and the parliamentary question that I have just mentioned is the unswerving consistency of the relevant Defence Ministers. They have been consistently compassionate and laudatory, but they have consistently refused to alter the anomalous position of service men injured in Bosnia compared with those injured by similar criminal acts in Northern Ireland, Germany or Hong Kong.

At about 20.30 hours on 3 May 1995, Maglaj school in Bosnia was hit by a single tank round, which was fired, it was thought, by a Serbian T34 tank. That school was a United Nations peacekeeping force accommodation unit housing a detachment of our forces. Six men were wounded, sustaining a variety of injuries.

The most seriously wounded was Sergeant Trevor Walker, at that time a corporal, of 21 Engineer Regiment. Sergeant Walker, who is now my constituent, sustained serious injuries to both legs, but particularly to his right leg. For reasons of time and possibly a certain amount of squeamishness, I will spare the House a reading of the medical report by the consultant at Queen Elizabeth military hospital at Woolwich on Sergeant Walker's injuries. I can confirm that it makes horrifying reading.

As a result of his injuries, Sergeant Walker has undergone 13 operations, the last of which was in January, when, after doctors had tried for nine months to save his leg—nine months of great suffering for Sergeant Walker and his wife—his right leg was amputated above the knee. Sergeant Walker's duties in Maglaj were to help to build a road for the civilian population, a job that is done well by the Royal Engineers, whose spiritual headquarters and Royal School of Military Engineering I am proud to have in my constituency. Such projects are the epitome of peacekeeping.

There is a question whether the incident in which Sergeant Walker was injured would have happened if there had been a more robust response to a similar attack on the school building a few days before. However, an air attack response was denied by the United Nations command, and the Bosnian Serbs felt safe in making their murderous attack on the peacekeepers. I say "murderous" deliberately, for that is exactly what it was, and the initial investigation by the special investigation branch of the military police was made on the basis of attempted murder.

If Sergeant Walker had sustained his injuries as a result of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland, it is beyond doubt that he would have been entitled to compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme. Under the new tariff, compensation for the loss of a leg above the knee would have been substantial.

Under the Ministry of Defence's parallel scheme for criminal injuries overseas, a similar but ex gratia sum would have been payable if Sergeant Walker had sustained his injuries in Germany or Hong Kong as the result of criminal activity. If he had been injured as a result of negligent behaviour by a fellow service man, he could, since the repeal in 1987 of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, have sued the Ministry of Defence for negligence in the way that Private Harness was successful in doing after he was accidentally shot by a fellow soldier.

It is possible that, if Sergeant Walker's injuries had followed an accident between two Army Land Rovers in Bosnia, he would also have had a possible case for negligence. That is significant, as many of the 18 service men killed and 41 seriously injured on UN operations in former Yugoslavia to mid-December 1995 sustained their injuries as a result of road accidents.

I understand that, since that time, the injuries sustained under North Atlantic Treaty Organisation command have also tended to be from road accidents. Had Sergeant Walker been serving directly for the UN rather than for his national force—perhaps as a military observer—he would also have been eligible to receive compensation for his injuries.

I have listed the circumstances under which Sergeant Walker might be eligible for compensation for his serious injuries. My hon. Friend the Minister is likely to tell me, however, that, because Sergeant Walker's injuries were sustained as a result of war or warlike operations, or military activity by warring factions, he is not entitled to compensation. That is wrong, because it is anomalous.

When they sign on, service men understand of course that, if they are required to serve their country in circumstances where the UK is actively engaged as a combatant—as in the Falkland islands or the gulf war—they may be asked to lay down their lives or to sustain serious injury, and they will not be compensated beyond the terms of the armed forces pension scheme and of the Department of Social Security war pension scheme.

[Mr. James Couchman]

In Bosnia, however, the UK has not been and is not a combatant, and nor was the UN, whose beret Sergeant Walker was wearing during his service in Maglaj. He was building a road for the civilian population as a peacekeeper when he and his colleagues were subjected to a murderous attack, which may constitute a war crime.

Sergeant Walker is still serving, and he has been constrained from speaking out, but I have seen him as a constituent on two occasions with his wife, and they have told me their story. He still receives his Army pay, and I have no doubt that he has received and will continue to receive every proper and compassionate consideration from the Army, but his injuries may prevent his fulfilling his engagement and, if he is discharged early on medical grounds, he will qualify for all the benefits under the armed forces pension scheme and under the DSS's war pension scheme.

Sergeant Walker will receive an index-linked pension for life, together with a tax-free lump sum equal to three times the annual rate of that pension. If his disability is assessed at 20 per cent. or more—which, in view of his injuries, seems highly likely—he would qualify for an enhanced tax-free pension, as well as an additional gratuity under AFPS. My hon. Friend will tell me all that, as he did when he wrote to me on 20 February. He will also tell me about the PAX-plus insurance scheme, which is available to service men going into a hazardous theatre of operations. Sergeant Walker had contributed to PAX, and will have received payment.

What my hon. Friend will not tell me is why it is necessary for our service personnel to purchase private insurance for death or personal accident cover when they are serving in our forces as peacekeepers under UN or NATO command. He will probably not tell me why it is that, when our troops are deployed as peacekeepers, they are not told in advance that they will not be eligible for compensation if they are killed or injured during their duties.

Sergeant Walker is a fine non-commissioned officer—one of the finest in his regiment, according to his former commanding officer, who foresaw promotion, certainly to warrant officer and possibly to a commission. Sergeant Walker's career cannot have been enhanced by injuries and may have been detrimentally affected, even curtailed, although he is working hard to get fit to return to duty. In that, he has been helped enormously by his determined and courageous wife.

For the sake of Sergeant Walker and for those like him who have been injured while serving as peacekeepers, my hon. Friend must reconsider either a no-fault compensation scheme, as Lord Swinfen proposed, or making service personnel serving as peacekeepers eligible for ex-gratia payments under the MOD's criminal injuries compensation overseas scheme.

Otherwise, our forces serving throughout the world on behalf of the UN as peacekeepers—increasingly, we have detachments serving in very unpleasant places throughout the globe—will be inequitably treated if they are killed or injured. Perhaps Sir Michael Bett's review of service conditions will offer an opportunity for such reconsideration, and my hon. Friend may wish to await his report to say what he might do in these circumstances.

Our forces are without equal. They serve selflessly and heroically, not just for the UK, but in the interests of oppressed people in many lands. If, during their duties, they are tragically killed or injured, as has befallen my constituent Sergeant Walker, they have a right to expect that they will be treated as generously as if they had received their injuries as the result of terrorist action in Northern Ireland. In short, there should be absolute equality of treatment for all our serving personnel. As I said, I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this subject again, but I regret the necessity to do so. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

7.15 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on securing this debate on a subject of profound concern not only to the House, but to the public at large. This is not the first time that my hon. Friend, who represents a constituency with a rich military heritage—I do not suppose that any other constituency in the land has a richer one—has raised the matter with me. He, other hon. Members and members of the general public have written to me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I know that my hon. Friend has a genuine, warm and real concern for the welfare of all service personnel.

Let me start by reaffirming that the safety of British forces, wherever they are deployed, is of paramount importance to the Government. In Bosnia, that is clearly something that we must, and do, take extremely seriously. I know that hon. Members will wish to join me in commending all the people who have served, or are serving, in former Yugoslavia for their courage and fortitude in just getting on with their everyday life, under what are regularly the most difficult circumstances, undertaking vital tasks in dangerous conditions with distinction and skill.

No one who has been to Bosnia in any weather, at any time, would come away with anything but the most extraordinary feeling of pride in what those young men and women have achieved. I consider myself deeply fortunate to have seen at first hand their outstanding work, both as part of the United Nations protection force and now as part of the NATO-led implementation force.

It is, of course, an inescapable fact of life that, in a theatre of operations and on the place of honour, there will be casualties. So far, some 24 UK service men have lost their lives since operations began in the region. To them, their families, friends and colleagues, we all offer our deepest sympathy. I hope that they will feel justly proud of the sacrifice made by those men in helping to save thousands of innocent lives and in the cause of peace.

It is also an inescapable and sad fact that 342 British soldiers have been injured while serving in Bosnia—some of them, like Sergeant Trevor Walker, seriously. I have immense sympathy for them and their families, and offer them my best wishes towards a speedy recovery.

My hon. Friend has referred to what he rightly considers to be an anomaly between payments made to service men injured in Bosnia and other warlike operations, and those injured in Northern Ireland. It may help him if I set out my Department's policy here, which I realise he already knows but which, for the sake of good order, I am obliged to do.

Members of the armed forces in Northern Ireland provide support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the fight against terrorism. They are not deemed to be involved in war operations while serving there, and are subject to the normal constraints of civil law. As terrorist acts are a criminal offence, any soldier or civilian injured in such attacks is entitled to apply to the Northern Ireland Compensation Agency for the award of criminal injury compensation.

In the past four years, 1,123 service personnel have applied for compensation under this scheme. The average settlement figure in 1995-96 for the scheme as a whole was about £6,000. My Department also pays criminal injury compensation to members of the armed forces and their dependants who are victims of crimes of violence while serving overseas on a similar basis.

However, where war operations or warlike operations are in progress as a result of military activity by warring factions, as in Bosnia, the normal process of the civil law will have broken down. Operations may be undertaken resulting in death or injury, which, if committed by someone subject to civil law, would constitute a criminal offence. It would therefore be impractical to try to extend the provisions of the criminal injury compensation scheme to cover the conduct of warlike operations in Bosnia.

As I have explained, members of the armed forces who are invalided from service receive for life the tax-free index-linked benefits of the armed forces pension scheme and the Department of Social Security war pension scheme.

Turning now to the case raised so compassionately by my hon. Friend, I should like again to say how deeply sorry I was to hear about Sergeant Walker's terrible injury, which he sustained last May when his observation post in the Maglaj school was hit by a tank round. My hon. Friend will understand that I feel truly for Sergeant Walker since I have on three occasions sat in the observation post in question for long periods at a stretch, and I have probably seen the tank that did the awful damage to Sergeant Walker.

My hon. Friend will understand that I am constrained by reasons of medical confidentiality, and I cannot comment in detail on Sergeant Walker's current medical condition. I can assure him, nevertheless, that the defence medical services are doing everything within their power to help him. It is too soon, however, to say whether Sergeant Walker will be able to continue with his Army career. In the meantime, he continues to serve on full pay. I am sure that hon. Members wish him well. I join my hon. Friend in praising the courage of Mrs. Walker, who has been a tower of strength to her husband.

Should Sergeant Walker be invalided out of the service, he will, of course, be entitled to a service-attributable lump sum and pension benefits from both the armed forces pension scheme and the DSS war pensions scheme. As I have just said, service-attributable invaliding pensions are tax-free, index-linked and payable for life. I cannot say at this time what the rate of pension will be, because that will depend upon date of final discharge and assessment of long-term disability. However, some illustrative examples may help the House to understand that Sergeant Walker will be properly provided for.

A sergeant aged 30 who is medically discharged after 12 years' service, and who is assessed by the Department of Social Security as 70 per cent. disabled, would be entitled to pensions under the armed forces pension scheme and the DSS war pension scheme totalling £9,204 a year. He would also receive tax-free lump sums amounting to £19,904. The estimated total capital value of these awards, assessed over the expected life of the recipient, would be likely to be about £220,000.

A corporal aged 25 medically discharged after eight years' service, who is assessed by the Department of Social Security as 50 per cent. disabled, would be entitled to pensions from the two schemes totalling £6,548 a year. He would also receive tax-free lump sums amounting to £13,561.

I fully understand—and share—the concern eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend that the arrangements that I have outlined should be as fair and comprehensive as possible. Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the armed forces' manpower, career and remuneration structures has recommended that the level of benefits payable to those who retire or die as a result of an injury attributable to service, and the procedure for determining whether an injury is attributable, should be reviewed. My Department is currently engaged in a thorough review of death and injury benefits for service personnel as part of our work on the detailed study and development of the independent review recommendations.

As part of this work, we have considered the feasibility of introducing a special scheme whereby additional lump sum compensation is paid where death or injury arises from warlike activity. I have already explained why it would be impractical to try to extend the provisions of the criminal injury compensation scheme to cover the conduct of war operations. In practice, it would also be very difficult to arrive at a fair and defensible definition of what constitutes a warlike operation. Would a soldier employed on a humanitarian relief mission who was killed or injured because his truck skidded and fell down a ravine be deemed to be engaged in warlike activity?

Extending cover to hazardous military training would be equally difficult. Accidents can and do happen to service personnel when they are not training; and accidents can happen in training which could be shown by statistics to be no more hazardous than civilian work. In practice, it would be very difficult to distinguish between hazardous military training and other everyday service duties.

We therefore believe that the right approach is to concentrate on a review of the current rates of attributable death in service and invaliding gratuities. This review may need to include the study of a number of representative case histories. Our objective would be to ensure that these benefits properly reflect the special needs of the bereaved and the most severely disabled, in all cases where death or injury is attributable to military service. This work is now in progress. I will keep my hon. Friend and the House informed of that progress.

We acknowledge that some ex-service personnel have special requirements as a result of their service with the armed forces. Of course, we recognise the particular needs of disabled ex-service people, for example, and the Government have not only preserved the preferential provisions of the war pensions scheme, but have done much to enhance it. War disablement pensioners are given priority when referred to the national health service for treatment of their pensioned disablement, both as out-patients and as in-patients, subject only to the needs of emergency or other cases.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

My Department has developed a comprehensive resettlement package, which includes an extensive range of briefings and training courses, incorporating arrangements for on-the-job training and the introduction of national vocational qualifications.

Service personnel due to be invalided out of the armed forces on medical grounds are eligible for the full range of resettlement provisions after only one year of reckonable service. That is a concessionary entitlement for disabled personnel, as the resettlement package is usually available only to those who have completed at least five years' reckonable service.

Personnel who are medically discharged are given priority over all other service leavers for places on resettlement briefings and training courses; in addition, a medically discharged service man or woman may seek further resettlement and employment advice for up to two years after discharge.

As my hon. Friend knows, the armed forces have always prided themselves on, and have long been envied for, their service family system—it is at the very core of the ethos of the service man's life. Care for serving personnel and their families is essential to the well-being of the forces. The after-care of those who have served and of their families is equally important, as is the special care that must be provided for those medically discharged, particularly the seriously disabled, and for the widows and widowers, children and parents, and the friends, of those who die in service.

The duty to provide after-care for those who no longer serve but who remain part of the wider military family, continues, as the many regimental and corps associations bear testament. We are truly fortunate to have the many service and welfare organisations, and, as my hon. Friend knows, the many veterans' organisations, including the regimental associations, the Royal British Legion—I visited West Malling in Kent only last weekend—and others who continue to provide advice, help and support to the ex-service community with great skill and enthusiasm.

Her Majesty's Government are truly conscious of the tireless work undertaken by the dedicated teams of voluntary workers throughout the country, and of the highly professional way in which they assist their colleagues. We very much value their advice and hold in high esteem the work they undertake.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham on advancing his case on behalf of Sergeant Walker in such a measured, sympathetic and compassionate manner. My hon. Friend knew very well what I was bound to say. The situation is not as satisfactory as we would like it to be. I hope that he will be reassured by the work that we are undertaking in the course of the Bett review.

We shall continue to ensure that Sergeant Walker and his family receive the very best care that is available. As my hon. Friend so rightly said, we have first-rate service men and women, and it is not only important but critical that we do all we can to assist them when they most need our help.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on the measured way in which he has presented the case to me. I shall be happy to continue to follow Sergeant Walker's case with my hon. Friend, and I very much hope that the matter will come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 May 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

1. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration has been given to extending the mobility component of the disability living allowance to children aged under five years suffering from defined illnesses. [28803]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): Entitlement to disability living allowance is not defined by a specific illness or disability, but is based on the effects of a disability on an individual's care and mobility needs. There is no age limit for the care component because we accept that the care needs of disabled children may be significantly greater than those of able-bodied children. However, there is generally not such a great difference in the help needed for mobility between children under five with disabilities and those without.

Mr. Mudie: Is the Minister aware that the seemingly sensible starting point for the mobility component of five years of age is of great inconvenience to parents with children below that age who have certain restrictive illnesses? Will he give some thought to that starting point, and consider parents without private transport who experience the sheer trauma of taking ill children and, often, burdensome medical equipment, on public transport?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman raises a particularly difficult child policy matter. I am aware that he has written to me about the case of his young constituent, Jacob. I want to make two points in response. First, the mobility component is intended specifically to help people become independently mobile, and the starting point of five years of age—the age when a child starts school—strikes a reasonable balance. Secondly, in respect of the case that he has raised, the family are receiving disability living allowance care component at the higher level, and invalid care allowance. I hope that he accepts that benefit money is going to that family.

Mr. Thomason: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it would cost tens of millions of pounds to pay the mobility component to children under the age of five? Will he further confirm that it is the policy of his Department to restrict expenditure wherever possible and to curb social security spending? Does he find it surprising that, again and again, Labour proposes extra expenditure in this field?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The cost of extending the mobility component to children under five years of age would be about £30 million. The Government have a proud record of spending on the long-term sick, which has increased by a factor of three since 1979, to £22 billion. We are now helping more than six times as many people as were helped by the previous Labour Government.

Family Poverty

2. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to meet Church leaders to discuss the impact and extent of family poverty in the United Kingdom. [28804]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): Ministers regularly meet representatives from a wide variety of organisations, including Church leaders.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is the Minister aware that the Christian Churches are concerned about the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots in society, increasing family poverty and growing deprivation? If he agrees with that analysis, what is he doing about it? If he disagrees, will he explain why to the people who complement their spiritual work with pastoral care in the community, and who daily witness the consequences of the selfish society that has been created during the past 17 years?

Mr. Burt: Until his final throw-away remark, I thought the hon. Gentleman's question was important. The point about poverty and how we deal with it concerns us all. The hon. Gentleman asked what we are doing about it. We have introduced a variety of measures to encourage people into work, as we know that work is the best answer to low income and poverty. I agree, however, that poverty is not just about material things—it includes spiritual matters as well. In my work with the single regeneration budget and city challenge, I see what the Government have done to bring about the right spirit in many poor communities. Indeed, Easterhouse, where Prince Charles and Jacques Chirac were last week, is an object lesson in what can be achieved. If the hon. Gentleman agrees that work is one of the answers, I am sure that he will welcome the drop in unemployment in his constituency in the past few years and, if he does, I cannot see how a minimum wage would help him to help people keep their jobs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend agree that many people welcome the assistance that the Government gave 10 years ago to the "Faith in the City" report? Many were present when our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke at Southwark cathedral on such issues, years before he took over the Department. I am glad that the

Government have followed many of the recommendations of that report in so far as they are directed to the nation, because trying to change people's lives in inner-city areas and to give them freedom from poverty is one of the main responsibilities of people in politics.

Mr. Burt: I entirely agree. Several initiatives were created in response to "Faith in the City" and the Church urban fund has a number of projects. I was interested to learn that a new chief executive has been appointed to the fund, who also believes that it is important that the advance into material well-being is accompanied by a change in people's spiritual attitudes. That is what the work of the Church is about. We have followed that line in a number of projects throughout the country. By restoring power to people as tenants and through education, the Government's policies have helped to stimulate the very changes that people need.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

3. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the reduction in reduced earnings allowance. [28805]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): A number.

Mrs. Clwyd: What would the Minister say to those disabled constituents of mine—many of them ex-miners—who were suddenly faced with a drop in income of £30 a week? How are they expected to cope with that sort of drop? It is yet another vindictive attack by the Government on the poor and the disabled.

Mr. Evans: I am afraid that the hon. Lady has misunderstood. The reduced earnings allowance is intended to compensate for reduced earnings. If a person is over pensionable age and not earning, it is unreasonable for them to go on receiving that allowance. Parliament decided as long ago as 1988 that, when people stopped earning after retirement age, the proper benefit was retirement allowance, which is tax free and non-contributory. Under the regulations and developing case law, some people managed to retain the reduced earnings allowance although they were over retirement age and had stopped earning, while many others did not. That was unfair and unreasonable and the Government have amended by regulation to correct that position.

Mrs. Peacock: I am sure that we all appreciate what my hon. Friend has said. We also appreciate that any change in anyone's income and life style is always a trauma. Can he confirm that the allowance was always meant to be for reduced earnings and was, therefore, available while people were of working age? When the rules were changed in 1988, some people managed to continue drawing that money after pension age and others did not, which in itself has set up differences between households.

Mr. Evans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister answer the central thrust of the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd)? We have been told by such organisations as the Disablement Income Group that 20,000 old disabled people are losing an average of £30 a week without any notice. Does he accept that that is completely unacceptable? How will he answer the ex-miners in my hon. Friend's constituency, mine and elsewhere, who are suffering from pneumoconiosis, and the ex-building workers who are suffering from asbestosis, who are claiming that their incomes have been drastically reduced? Are not the Government showing once again—as they did on the Community Care Direct Payments Bill—that they could not care less for the problems of older disabled people?

Mr. Evans: The change was announced last November. It has been Government policy since 1988. It was accidental and arbitrary that some people managed to take advantage of the rules. It was possible for people who retired the day before their retirement birthday to go on receiving reduced earnings allowance even if they never did another day's work in their lives. The interesting question for the hon. Gentleman is whether, at a cost of £25 million a year, he is pledging to restore the change.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is it not clear from its attacks on the Government that the Labour party wants to give the impression that it would restore the social security spending changes while telling the country that it, too, would cut social security spending? Is that not yet another case of saying two opposing things at the same time?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right on all points.

Social Fund Loans

4. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants were refused a social fund loan on the grounds of inability to pay, in (a) 1991–92 and (b) 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [28807]

Mr. Roger Evans: In 1991-92, out of 2.07 million applications, 37,213 were refused on that ground. In 1994-95, out of 2.5 million applications, 12,303 were refused on that ground. Refusals on grounds of inability to repay decreased again in 1995-96 to 10,411 out of 2.5 million applications.

Mr. Battle: Is not the social fund loan system proving to be a classic Catch-22? Unemployed people cannot afford to pay back the required interest. Moreover, grants are made only to people who have been discharged from long-term stays in hospital or who have been released from prison. There is nothing for families who want to set up home. Are not the Government dumping their social obligations on charity second-hand shops and driving people into the hands of unscrupulous loan sharks?

Mr. Evans: That is wrong on all points and a grotesque exaggeration. For an outlay of £344 million since the fund was set up, £1.6 billion-worth of loans have been made, which have helped five times as many people as a simple grant scheme would have helped for the same cost. In the past year, 41,000 budget loan applications were refused and grants given instead.

Mr. Bradley: Does the Minister recognise that the social fund is failing to help the people in greatest need—60 per cent. of the budget is swallowed by administrative costs? The excellent children's charities report, "Out of pocket: the failure of the social fund", shows that many vulnerable groups, especially children in families, are not receiving adequate help. How does the Minister respond to the many examples in the report of families having to cut back on food and other essential items because they have to repay loans instead of getting grants? Will he consider the workings of the social fund and ensure that it alleviates poverty rather than reinforces it, as it does for many families?

Mr. Evans: I can only conclude, from the logic of the hon. Gentleman's question, that he would scrap loans and replace them with grants at an annual extra cost of £263 million. Is that a spending pledge from the Labour party?

Social Security Expenditure

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the proportion of gross domestic product devoted to social security expenditure (a) in 1994–95 and (b) in 1995–96. [28808]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): In 1994-95, social security expenditure accounted for nearly 13.1 per cent. of GDP. For 1995-96, it fell to just under 13 per cent. We expect reforms already introduced to bring it below 12 per cent. by the end of the century.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Secretary of State say how much of the reduction in the share of GDP taken by social security spending is being borne by people who are already poor through benefit cuts, and how much is the result of more people getting jobs?

Mr. Lilley: I have not made any allowance for our great and continuing success in reducing unemployment. If that continues, as I assume it will, the situation will be further improved. The reforms that I have introduced have been sensible, well thoughtout and designed to focus benefit on those in need. I do not propose to take away benefit from children who stay on at school to study and get qualifications because that would deter—as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) proposes to—children from doing that and getting good jobs. That would mean that they would be more likely to be on the dole and increase public expenditure.

Mrs. Roe: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that social security spending would increase if the jobseeker's allowance were scrapped, because work incentives would be damaged and dependence increased? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that work-to-welfare policy was revealed as being on the Labour party's hidden agenda in the article by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that appeared during the weekend?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. We are committed to a policy of getting people off benefit and back into work. All Labour's proposals would get them out of work and on to benefit.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) let the cat out of the bag by saying that Labour was committed to abolishing the jobseeker's allowance. He has since told us that they were words he did not write in an article he had not read. None the less, what he said was official Labour policy; he is a Labour spokesman. Another Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), said in the House on behalf of Labour Members:

"We reject the JSA and all it stands for . . . we will get rid . . . of the JSA".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 765.]

Hon. Members: Ah.

Mr. Lilley: Were they words he did not say?

Unclaimed Benefit

6. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the level of unclaimed benefit in the last year for which figures are available. [28809]

Mr. Burt: The rate of take-up varies from benefit to benefit. It is lowest among income-related benefits, but even for those only about £1 of every £10 available goes unclaimed. Child benefit has a particularly high take-up.

Dr. Wright: Does the Minister agree that, although it is very important to crack down on fraud, it is equally important to ensure that people receive the benefits to which they are entitled? Does he understand that there is much anxiety about the proposed threat to the benefit line service, the freeline service and the out-of-hours service which, if it is carried out, would make it much more difficult for people to know about and claim the benefits to which they are properly entitled?

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is important that the Benefits Agency gets its message about benefits over. No decisions have been taken about the matters that he raises, but the Department and the Benefits Agency spend £26 million a year getting over information. We have good local information services. Our information officers travel to meet people. There was a joint meeting in Coventry last week with Age Concern, to which more than 300 people came, so there is a wide variety of mechanisms for getting information about benefit out, plus as many welfare rights organisations as anyone would care to mention.

I do not believe that it is possible to substantiate a charge that many people do not know about the availability of benefits or where they can go for help, but we count it as very important that people have information available to them, and the Government and the agency will continue to make available information about benefits.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will my hon. Friend take to heart what the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) said about people receiving the benefits to which they are entitled? Are not 16 to 18-year-olds entitled to the £1,000 or so help that they receive from child benefit to get them through their A-levels? Would he, like me, be ashamed to be a member of a party that proposed to rob them of that money?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend has said it all.

Ms Lynne: The Minister must accept that the low take-up of benefit is a problem; that is why child benefit is so effective. Does he agree that scrapping child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds would deter many young people from entering further education? Will he also give a guarantee today that the Government will uprate child benefit at least in line with inflation?

Mr. Burt: The Government's child benefit policy was laid out in the manifesto, and we have stuck to it as the cornerstone of support for families. I appreciate the support that the hon. Lady has given to child benefit and her opposition to the cut proposed by the Labour party. If she supported the Child Support Agency instead of organisations such as NACSA—Network Against the Child Support Act—that would be equally welcome to Conservative Members.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the payment of child benefit to children between the ages of 16 and 18 often determines whether they can stay on in education, and that taking away their child benefit significantly decreases their life chances? Is not that a disgrace?

Mr. Burt: Yes, child benefit has been one of the most significant benefits for families—certainly for those who may find it difficult to put their children through education. This extra help for those between 16 and 18 has counted for a great deal. I find it difficult to understand why the Labour party has proposed the cut.

Mr. Denham: Why is the Minister so complacent about the 600,000 pensioners who do not claim the income support to which they are entitled? Will he confirm his Department's estimate that they go without an average £14 a week? Does he agree that such pensioners must be among the poorest people in Britain? Is that why they are so low on his list of priorities?

Mr. Burt: When the hon. Gentleman's party was last in power, the lowest 10 per cent. of the population by income included almost double the number of pensioners who occupy that decile now. I do not think that he cared much about the pensioners then; he does not seem to care about 16 to 18-year-olds now. Care and concern for young people and pensioners is best left in our hands.

Social Security Expenditure

7. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the annual average real growth in social security expenditure since 1966; and what was the figure in 1995–96. [28810]

Mr. Lilley: Between 1965-66 and 1995-96, social security expenditure grew in real terms by an average of 4.4 per cent. a year. Growth to 1998-99 is projected to be 1.3 per cent. a year—well within the expected growth of the economy.

Sir Michael Neubert: What does that reduction in average real growth represent in savings to the social security budget? What prospects are there of its continuing into the next century?

Mr. Lilley: The reforms that we have introduced, amounting to the biggest programme of welfare reform since the Beveridge policy was introduced in 1948, will save in the next Parliament some £5 billion a year and in due course more than £15 billion a year. All our reforms have been opposed by the Labour party.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As the Minister reflects on the growth of social security spending, will he also consider how small a part of that growth is accounted for by support for carers, who save the Exchequer an estimated £34 billion a year but who often impoverish themselves in giving that service? Will he review the system of benefits for them, including the threshold of earnings at which the invalid care allowance is withdrawn; and the hours of caring that have to be put in to qualify for invalid care allowance? Will he particularly review the ridiculous and hurtful rule that allows people the allowance if they support one person for 35 hours a week but not if they support two people—perhaps two elderly parents—for the same amount of time?

Will the Minister raise the invalid care allowance and extend the carers premium on income support to people who take up the responsibility after the age of 65?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman knows full well, because he studies these matters, that carers' benefits are the fastest growing area of expenditure in the welfare system. He was outspoken on welfare issues during his time in my party. I wonder whether he is going to say in public what we know he believes in private about the proposals of his new party to take away child benefit from those who stay on at school. Or is he now less willing to parade his conscience in public?

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his reforms are designed to target those in greatest need and to increase incentives to get people back into work?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A key to getting people back into work is the jobseeker's allowance, which we introduced in the teeth of Labour opposition and which we know Labour is determined to withdraw and abolish. We are amused to hear Labour Members say that this is part of another review—it is time they stopped reviewing and came up with concrete proposals and policies.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Secretary of State accept that a major component of rising social security expenditure in recent years has been the growth in expenditure on housing benefit? Does he accept the conclusion of the Social Security Committee last week, that something like £2 billion a year is being defrauded from the housing benefit system, much of it by private sector landlords? Will the Secretary of State now take far more seriously the issue of landlord fraud on housing benefit? Will he accept the sensible recommendations of the Select Committee?

Mr. Lilley: I have introduced a number of reforms to deal with exactly the problem of housing benefit fraud. The Labour party opposed them all. I introduced penalties and rewards for local authorities—particularly Labour-controlled authorities—that had done shamefully little to crack down on housing benefit fraud, which was

their responsibility. We want to know when the hon. Gentleman will produce concrete proposals on anything. John Smith set up a social justice commission to review social security policy. When it reported, the Leader of the Opposition promised to review its proposals and ordered the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to review that review. As soon as his hon. Friends make any concrete proposals, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) promises a further review. The hon. Gentleman is a serial reviewer.

Sir James Molyneaux: Does the Secretary of State detect a certain convergence of views between the two Front Benches on the need to contain escalating social security spending, which will otherwise race out of control in the next century?

Mr. Lilley: I wish that there were a convergence between the two Front Benches on the issue of social security, but the Labour party has opposed every reform that I have introduced. Every Labour proposal involves increased spending. What Labour Members describe as "hard choices" are simply methods of financing further Government expenditure by taking away money from ordinary families. I am afraid that Labour remains the party of high spending.

Social Security Reforms

8. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the long-term effect on public spending of his social security reforms. [28811]

Mr. Lilley: The major reforms that I have announced to date are expected to reduce public expenditure by £5 billion a year at today's prices by the turn of the century. That will rise to £15 billion a year in the longer term.

Mr. Booth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whereas Conservative policies are based on fairness and targeting help to those who are most in need, those of the Opposition are weighed down by the millstone of past commitments and the albatross of future divisions?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why the Opposition have been unable to produce any concrete proposals for reforming the social security system. We were promised six months of thinking the unthinkable and then some concrete, costed, detailed proposals. Instead, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) made a speech that even his friends thought he would regret. I shall quote one of them, writing in *The Spectator*:

"he is a decent fellow"—

I share that view—

"and I cannot believe that he could re-read his own text without embarrassment."

The Opposition should forget about thinking the unthinkable and just do some thinking.

Ms Glenda Jackson: How can the Secretary of State possibly know what future benefits there will be when the reply that I received from his Department in response to a series of questions asking how many claimants have been taken off the benefit register in only two benefit offices in response to his social security benefits changes was that no such information is held and the cost of obtaining it would be disproportionate? Is it not the case that he neither knows nor cares how many people are living in penury because of his brutal changes?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady knows that we have put forward and implemented detailed, concrete and costed proposals. The fact that the information is not necessarily broken down parish by parish does not discount that achievement. When the Labour party offers concrete, costed proposals, she will be in a position to argue and to ask those sorts of questions.

Benefits System (Computerisation)

9. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to announce the decision on equipment for the computerisation of the benefits system. [28812]

Mr. Lilley: On 15 May, I announced that Pathway Group Ltd. had won the contract to design, install and operate the equipment that will automate the payment of benefits at post offices.

Mr. Atkins: I welcome the fact that a British company, ICL, has led the Pathway consortium to winning the biggest computer contract in Europe to cope with the problems of fraud. As it is also coupled with the innovative software of companies such as Escher and De la Rue, does my right hon. Friend agree that the benefit card will go a long way to solving the problems of fraud and thereby provide substantial sums of money for those in real need?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's welcome for that further step toward the introduction of the benefit payment card. Over the lifetime of the eight-year contract, we expect to save more than £1 billion a year by virtually eliminating method of payment fraud on order books and giros. It will make life easier for claimants and they will be less vulnerable to theft and attack. It will save the taxpayer money and reinforce the viability of the national network of post offices.

Mr. Miller: Some months ago, the Secretary of State agreed with me about the importance of maintaining the privacy of personal data on his Department's computers. Will he publish any evidence that he has submitted to the Home Office's prior options review regarding the function of data protection in the registrar's office, or were they simply weasel words, as he has not submitted any such evidence?

Mr. Lilley: We must stick by our duty to maintain the confidentiality of the data that we receive from benefit claimants and recipients. I will happily see whether I can publish any evidence and give it to the hon. Gentleman in order to assist him with his inquiries.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My right hon. Friend has said that computerisation and the benefit payment card will help to crack down on fraud. Will he give a commitment to

publicise the telephone number that the public can use to provide information about those who are fraudulently claiming benefit?

Mr. Lilley: Members of the public throughout the country help us by providing information about benefit fraud and abuse, and they do so by telephoning their local benefit agency. We are running spotlight campaigns throughout the country which focus on particular areas. We urge those who have drifted into fraud to make good their arrangements with us and invite people to help us. I am happy to say that thousands of people are providing information and we are making substantial savings as a result.

Jobseeker's Allowance

10. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the eligibility criteria for those seeking the jobseeker's allowance. [28814]

Mr. Roger Evans: A number.

Mr. Sheerman: Is it not a fact that there is room for a decent jobseeker's allowance in this country? However, will not the allowance that the Government are introducing penalise at least a quarter of a million people who will be worse off after its introduction? Why is it that, every time the Government tinker with and slash the welfare system, they make people's lives worse rather than better?

Mr. Evans: There are many winners from the jobseeker's allowance: those who benefit from the earnings top-up, the four week run-on for housing benefit and so on. The interesting query arising from the hon. Gentleman's question is whether the Labour party is committed to abolishing that allowance. If it is, that represents another spending pledge of £170 million a year. Added to what Labour Front-Bench Members have spent already this afternoon, their expenditure would amount to £475 million each year.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Is that not what we expect from a party that only thinks the unthinkable and, when it comes to implementing something, only says the undoable?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right: the Labour party is deeply divided and unfit for office.

Mr. Skinner: When are the Government going to deal with that other jobseeker's allowance whereby 40 Tory Members of Parliament have jobs on the side, moonlighting? They get massive allowances, but they do not have the guts to reveal them in the parliamentary register. The Tory party takes money from Serbs and all the rest of them to finance the general election. Let us get rid of those allowances.

Mr. Evans: Union paymasters deeply divided and unfit for office—the hon. Gentleman makes my point.

Pensioners

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the annual effect of inflation on the number of pensioners eligible for social security payments in addition to the state pension. [28815]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): Benefits for pensioners are uprated annually in line with inflation. The Government's low inflation policy has meant that benefits retain their value over the year—in contrast to 1974 to 1979, when inflation was running as high as 27 per cent. Pensioners' savings, too, are protected and able to grow. Investment income now contributes an average of £27.40 per week to their income—unlike the earlier period, when high inflation all but wiped out their savings' real value.

Mr. Butler: Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour levels of inflation hurt pensioners in two ways: first, by weekly devaluations of the spending power of their benefits between upratings; and, secondly and most importantly, by wiping out the value of their savings? Does he have any estimate of the number of pensioners who, today, are still adversely affected by Labour's achievement of 25 per cent. annual inflation?

Mr. Heald: As a result of inflation in the 1970s, people who had saved all their lives saw their life savings destroyed by inflation. Under this Government, increasingly more pensioners have savings of higher value, leading to a rise in income of 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Mr. William O'Brien: What is the Minister's response to my constituents who received the pension increase that he outlined, but who then suffered a decrease in housing benefit and in council tax refund and who received from Yorkshire Water a demand that is 2.5 per cent. above the inflation rate—leaving them worse off than before the pension increase?

Mr. Heald: The increase—which was 3.9 per cent., based on the retail prices index in September—takes into account all increases in costs. The average income has now increased by 51 per cent. since 1979. That would not have happened under Labour.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that 66 per cent. of recently retired people now receive income from an occupational pension, compared to only 55 per cent. in 1979? What does he think an inflation rate of 27 per cent. would do to that occupational pension, were we to return to inflation rates that existed under the previous Labour Administration?

Mr. Heald: The same betrayal that happened in the 1970s would happen again. That is why it is vital that pensioners continue to support the Government, who have so much improved their position over the years.

Cold Weather Payments

12. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to be able to announce the outcome of this year's review into the cold weather payments monitoring stations. [28816]

Mr. Roger Evans: A comprehensive review is currently under way. Any proposals to change the existing weather stations or postcode links will be laid before the House in the autumn.

Mr. Kennedy: As a part of that review, will the Minister give me at least an interim update on what has happened since we last met vis-à-vis the Tiree weather station trigger point and those parts of my constituency that are currently adversely affected? Is he more optimistic or more pessimistic since we last spoke?

Mr. Evans: Tempted though I am to answer the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I cannot do so. He came to see me and, like many other hon. Members, made representations, all of which will be most carefully considered.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend is conducting his review, will he remember that there are parts of the United Kingdom that are colder than others, and that those parts are not always in the most northern extremes? Therefore, one must remember that people who suffer, suffer equally badly, regardless of where they are, if the temperature is low.

Mr. Evans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I should emphasise that weather stations are chosen in consultation with the Meterological Office, using its judgment and expert climatological experience.

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister will remember that, in his response to a parliamentary question, he said that it normally took 63 per cent. more fuel to heat a gas-fired house in Braemar than to heat such a house in Bristol. When considering the replacement of weather monitoring stations, will he take into account the prevailing weather conditions, which include wind-chill factors and damp and are not solely related to cold snaps during the winter? Will he also accept the recommendations of the all-party warm homes group?

Mr. Evans: I shall take into account all representations that are made, but the wind-chill factor is a rather difficult element to reflect in a national scheme.

Child Benefit

13. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in favour of abolishing child benefit. [28817]

Mr. Lilley: I have received no representations from any hon. Members in favour of the teenage tax proposals of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to abolish child benefit for over-16-year-olds staying on at school.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend find it surprising that the Labour party has taken a Trappist vow? Is he—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is, of course, going to ask a question relating to a matter for which the Minister has responsibility.

Mr. Marshall: Has my right hon. Friend received any representations advocating that child benefit be paid to foreigners and taken away from British children between the ages of 16 and 18? Does he find it surprising that there are those who want to pay more to teenagers who are not studying, and to take money away from those who are?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One reason for the extreme embarrassment among Labour Members at the proposal advanced by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is that, while he proposed to withdraw child benefit from those aged over 16 who stay on to acquire qualifications, the Labour party voted to extend it to foreigners who enter this country on the express understanding that they would not be entitled to British benefits. What a slap in the face for British children.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [28832]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Prime Minister tell the House about the foreign policy implications, and the implications for our troops on the ground, of the governing party's decision to accept lots and lots of Bosnian Serb money? Does he accept that our troops cannot be seen as impartial when their commanders at home have accepted money from a—

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me put the hon. Gentleman straight. The Prime Minister has no ministerial responsibility whatever for any funding for his party. *[Interruption.]* Order. If the hon. Gentleman is talking about troops, that is an entirely different matter. Let me make it clear, in case any hon. Member wishes to ask the same question later, that the Prime Minister has no ministerial responsibility for money that goes to the Conservative party. Now, put the question properly and correctly.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Prime Minister accept that there are foreign policy implications, and implications for

our troops on the ground, in the position that the governing party has adopted with regard to Bosnian Serb money?

The Prime Minister: Nothing ever stands in the way of the interests of British troops as far as the Government are concerned.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity today to take note of the report of the Transport Select Committee on airport capacity? Will he undertake to give serious consideration to the formulation of a long-term framework for airport policy, possibly including the provision of an estuarial airport, so that there may be environmental relief for the existing London airports?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly look carefully at the report to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Blair: In the light of the concern expressed even in Government circles about the funding of political parties, is not the right, fair and honourable thing to do to widen the remit of the Nolan committee so that the funding of all political parties could be looked at in a proper and impartial manner?

The Prime Minister: No. I do not believe that that is the right way to proceed. Party funding has been investigated by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which made a number of recommendations on the openness of party accounts. The Conservative party accepted all those recommendations: the Labour party has not accepted all those recommendations. If the Labour leader is concerned about the matter, perhaps he will now commit himself to do so.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister has allegations to make about any party's political funding, is not the proper and reasonable thing to do to refer the matter to the Nolan committee so that it can consider it impartially? If the governing party does not accept that, the inevitable question that everyone will ask is what it has got to hide.

The Prime Minister: The leader of the Labour party may not have heard in the hubbub, but I answered his second question—since it was the same as his first question—a few moments ago. I will repeat it for him. The matter has been investigated by the Home Affairs Select Committee. We follow the remit it set out: the Labour party does not.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Does Mr. Blair wish to come back?

Mr. Blair: I do. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Be quiet.

Mr. Blair: I rise by popular request. When gifts are disguised as loans and money is accepted from foreigners, most people in this country would think—would they not?—that the best thing would be to have the Nolan committee consider party funding, so that justice could be done and be seen to be done and not covered up and hidden by the Conservative party.

The Prime Minister: It is really no use the leader of the Labour party flying into a tantrum. It is only in the Labour party that donations and money buy influence. In the Labour party, the trade unions provide the funds in return for votes at Labour's party conference and the party's trade union paymasters still have a say in Labour's election manifesto. That is the real scandal in party funding and the Labour leader cannot duck it.

Mr. Jessel: Here is a popular matter. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, this morning, the National Heritage Select Committee reported on the national lottery? It said that the national lottery is a huge success. It is twice the success hoped for by the most optimistic optimists.

The Prime Minister: It is undoubtedly a great success and is raising huge sums of money for good causes. I am especially pleased to note that the fears expressed by so many people some months ago that charitable donations would fall are now shown to be wrong. In addition to the fact that donations have risen, a substantial amount from the lottery fund also goes to charities.

Mr. Ashdown: Has the Prime Minister ever discussed with Government officials donations from Serb sources to the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: I do not discuss donations to the Conservative party with civil servants, nor have I. The right hon. Gentleman should know—it was pointed out to the House some time ago—that I devolved any responsibility whatever for party fund raising more than three years ago to avoid any possible conflict of interest. I did that not recently, but several years ago.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend take note of the efforts of Mr. Gerry Adams to try to distance Sinn Fein from the IRA? Will my right hon. Friend remember that, when Mr. Adams tells us that he has consulted the IRA, he has merely looked in his bathroom mirror?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that Sinn Fein and the IRA are two sides of the same coin. That point is well known to every right hon. and hon. Member. We believe that it is extremely important that the talks on Northern Ireland are successful. The only way in which Sinn Fein will find itself a part of those talks is if there is a clear-cut, unequivocal ceasefire by the IRA. In the absence of that, Sinn Fein will not be part of the talks. I hope that that is entirely clear to Sinn Fein, to the IRA and to every hon. Member.

Q2. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [28833]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Prentice: Given the respective states of their finances this time last year, can the Prime Minister tell the House why his Government are still massively in debt but his party, all of a sudden, is not?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady looks at the figures, she will see a substantial reduction in the fiscal deficit; the figure has been falling for some time and will go on falling. I am sure that she will be pleased about that.

Q3. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [28834]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my right hon. Friend aware that hundreds of thousands of families have cause to be grateful to him for his introduction, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, of the tax-exempt special savings account? Is that not the right way to create a real stakeholder society, rather than abolishing child benefit and imposing new taxes on cars, which one half of the Labour party wishes to do and the other half does not?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right in both aspects of his question. TESSAs have proved a huge success. Literally billions of pounds have been saved by families in TESSAs; many of them are now coming to maturity, and a large proportion of that matured sum is now being reinvested. I believe that that is the right way to encourage wealth, for the determination of individual purchases and to pass on between generations. We believe in the acquisition of wealth—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am pleased to hear that the Opposition do not believe in that. It explains their proposal for a tartan tax, and the shadow transport spokesman's desire to tax people more often; it explains their proposal to tax families with youngsters going through A-levels and their proposal to tax everything that they can possibly lay their hands on to fund their expenditure plans. I am happy to set out the clear difference between our party and the Labour party on spending and taxes.

Mr. Fatchett: Has the Prime Minister seen the report on Yorkshire Water's failure last summer to deliver a regular and uninterrupted water supply to the people of west Yorkshire? Does he recognise that that privatised company failed in its obligations to the people of west Yorkshire and in its obligation not to put at risk the health and economic activity of those people? Does the Prime Minister agree that it is time that the people of west Yorkshire benefited from Yorkshire Water and had a reduction in their water bills? Can the Prime Minister explain why he is the only person in the country who now seems prepared to defend the privatised Yorkshire Water?

The Prime Minister: I am interested to note that the hon. Gentleman still has such innate hostility to private ownership. I am delighted to say that large numbers of people yesterday showed no innate hostility to buying Railtrack when, once again, we had a privatisation that was massively over-subscribed.

I made it perfectly clear that we want Yorkshire Water to consider and to take action, as the commissioners have recommended that it should. It has begun to do so. It has completed a £100 million programme of pipeline and pumping station construction and this year it has made a £12 million investment in leakage reduction. Those are the measures that we expect it to take so that it can provide the service that consumers in Yorkshire expect and deserve.

Q4. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [28835]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to endorse the timely and apposite speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary at the European Research Group last Friday? May I especially draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the Home Secretary's suggestion that some states in a flexible Europe should be able to repatriate powers from Brussels? In that regard, could not Her Majesty's Government give notice at the intergovernmental conference that we intend to repatriate to our country control over our own agriculture and fisheries, and make British laws superior to European laws?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I first raised the question of what subsequently became called variable geometry in Europe well over two years ago, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) when he was Foreign Secretary. We have no doubt that that is the direction in which the European Union must develop as it enlarges in future. In relation to fisheries, as I have said to the House before, we shall be seeking changes in the common fisheries policy in the intergovernmental conference.

Madam Speaker: Rev. Martin Smyth.

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will take the point of order after questions and statements.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While I welcome the Prime Minister's earlier response, does he accept that it is not enough for Sinn Fein to say, "We are no longer part of the IRA'" when, through its leadership, it has at no time condemned the atrocities and bombings of the IRA? It would be only in that context that anyone could have confidence in it as a qualified political party.

The Prime Minister: I hope that everyone would condemn terrorist outrages. There can be no justification for them. As we have made clear, we expect every party that is eligible to take part in the talks that will take place after 10 June to accept at the outset, without equivocation, each and every aspect of the Mitchell principles. That is an essential prerequisite to taking part in the talks.

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have to remind the hon. Gentleman that points of order are taken after statements, of which there are two today. The first is from the Prime Minister.

EU Beef Ban

3.32 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement on our continuing efforts to get the ban on British beef and beef products lifted, and on the implications for our wider European policy.

As the House will know, we have been making every effort with the European Commission and with the member states to lift the ban on beef and beef products imposed two months ago by the European Union. We appreciate the difficult situation on the beef markets of a number of member states, the fragile state of consumer confidence throughout Europe, and the political pressures faced by a number of Governments, but we have put in place a wide range of measures to ensure that all products reaching the market are safe on any normal definition of the word.

As a result of controls on feed, the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in Britain is falling rapidly, and will continue to do so. There can no longer be any conceivable justification for the ban remaining in place. It is having a hugely damaging effect on the beef industry throughout Europe.

We have explained very clearly the extent of the measures that we have taken—going well beyond those in many other European Union member states—to ensure the safety of British beef and beef products. The Commission has played a notably helpful role in following carefully the scientific advice.

As a result, the Commission recently made a proposal to lift the ban on gelatine, tallow and semen. That is based on the scientific evidence that those products are safe when produced in agreed ways. A majority of member states supported that proposal when it was put to the standing veterinary committee yesterday, but it did not attract the required qualified majority to enable it to take effect. I should like to thank those countries that supported it, and President Santer and Commissioner Fischler for their determination to put the matter to the vote.

President Santer and Commissioner Fischler have confirmed that they stand by the proposal that they put to the standing veterinary committee yesterday. That proposal has to be confirmed by the Commission tomorrow. It will then be submitted to the Agriculture Council on 3 and 4 June. Under the procedures, the proposal would then be implemented unless there were a simple majority against it in the Council.

There is therefore a prospect of progress on that narrow front. I am grateful for the firm view taken by the Commission, and for the support of the majority of member states. However, the present position is clearly unacceptable. A balanced proposal based on the best scientific advice has been ignored by a number of member states, in some cases despite prior assurances of support. I must tell the House that I regard such action as a wilful disregard of Britain's interests, and, in some cases, a breach of faith.

Moreover, we have still been unable to reach agreement on further steps towards a progressive lifting of the wider ban, which is clearly our main objective. Some of our partners are reluctant even to contemplate moves in that direction, for reasons that have nothing whatsoever to do with the science involved.

Important national interests for Britain are involved in this matter. I cannot tolerate those interests being brushed aside by some of our European partners, with no reasonable grounds to do so. The top priority of our European policy must be to get the unjustified ban on beef derivatives lifted as soon as possible and to establish a clear path for the lifting of other aspects of the wider ban. We shall continue our present efforts, although these are not enough.

We have a strong legal case against the ban as a whole, and particular aspects of it. We made it clear from the outset that we believed the ban to be unlawful and disproportionate, and that we would therefore be bringing proceedings. Those proceedings will begin this week. We shall also begin this week our claim for interim measures, aimed at achieving those interim remedies unreasonably denied us in negotiation. Although our wider proceedings will inevitably take time to be heard, the application for the interim remedies should be heard within two to six weeks at the outside.

The interim measures application has a number of separate elements. One is the lifting of the ban on gelatine, tallow and semen. If the Agriculture Council does not approve the lifting of the ban on 3 and 4 June, we shall ask the court to lift it. We shall also be asking the court to lift the worldwide ban on exports of British beef. The beef is safe, and there is no practical possibility of it being reimported into the Community.

A third element is the ban on beef from specialist beef herds, in particular slow-maturing, grass-fed herds that have never seen a single case of BSE and are among the finest in the world. As soon as appropriate verification schemes are in place—and preparations are already well advanced—we shall ask the Council to lift this ban—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order to hear the statement.

The Prime Minister: I repeat that a third element is the ban on beef from specialist beef herds. That is not justified. As soon as appropriate verification schemes are in place, we shall ask the Council to lift the ban. If we get no satisfaction, we shall again pursue the legal remedies open to us.

But those legal steps are not in themselves sufficient. We shall continue to press the scientific case on our partners and pursue our own programme to eradicate BSE. I have to tell the House that, without progress towards lifting the ban, we cannot be expected to continue to co-operate normally on other Community business.

I say this with great reluctance, but the European Union operates through good will. If we do not benefit from good will from partners, clearly we cannot reciprocate. Progress will not be possible in the intergovernmental conference or elsewhere until we have agreement on lifting the ban on beef derivatives and a clear framework in place leading to lifting of the wider ban.

We will raise the question of the ban at all Councils, including the Foreign Affairs Council. If necessary, we shall seek special Councils. I shall make it clear that I expect agreement on how to deal with those problems to be behind us by the time the European Council meets in Florence on 21 and 22 June. If it is not, the Florence meeting is bound to be dominated by the issue. It could

not proceed with our normal co-operation unless it faced up to the crisis of confidence affecting not only consumers but Governments throughout Europe.

That is not how I wish to do business in Europe—but I see no alternative. We cannot continue business as usual within Europe when we are faced with the clear disregard by some of our partners of reason, of common sense and of Britain's national interests. We continue to want to make progress through negotiation; but if that is not possible, we are bound to use the legal avenues open to us and the political means at our disposal.

I believe that the whole House recognises the strength of our case and the urgent need for progress. The approach that I have outlined deserves to command support throughout the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Let us now find out exactly what the Prime Minister means by that statement. We share the great disappointment at the failure to get the ban at least partially lifted. We believe that there is no justification whatever for its continuing. The right regulations are now in place, and all reasonable scientific measures have been taken. Of course we shall support the Government in any sensible moves to ensure that the negotiations are successful.

There is no doubt about the deep sense of frustration, especially if, as the Prime Minister says, assurances have been given privately and then broken. However, can I now be clear about exactly what the Prime Minister proposes? As I understand it, he is saying that, unless there is both an agreement to lift the ban on derivatives—as we know, that may happen for other reasons—and a framework in place for easing the wider ban totally by 21 June, Britain will engage in a policy of non-co-operation.

May I ask two questions about that? First, what does the Prime Minister believe would be an acceptable framework and time scale for easing the wider ban? Secondly, and more importantly, I ask him to be specific as to what the policy of non-co-operation actually means. For example, does it mean—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Marlow, do be quiet.

Mr. Blair: With all due respect, before judgment can be passed on the policy of non-co-operation, we must know exactly what is meant by it.

For example, does the policy mean non-payment of European contributions, or doing anything in breach of treaty obligations, as many of the Prime Minister's hon. Friend would like? Will it involve a boycott of European institutions, non-attendance at meetings, or attendance with silence? Or does it mean refusal to participate in any other discussions at the intergovernmental conference unless the ban is lifted? Will the policy involve, as we read in the newspapers yesterday, the blocking of progress on Europol, and Europewide co-operation on policing? That suggestion has been made.

I assume from what the Prime Minister said that he has a clear strategy. At the moment the language is strong, but there is an absence of particulars as to exactly what it means. *[Interruption.]* It is the Prime Minister who is proposing the policy, so we should be clear what he means by it.

The right hon. Gentleman's statement should not mask or disguise the wider questions that must be asked about the Government's handling of the BSE crisis. There has been profound dissatisfaction with the way in which the negotiations have been conducted. What is the current negotiating position of other countries? What are they now asking us to do?

May I ask the Prime Minister about a specific point that has been raised by hon. Members from all parties? Is not the reason for the opposition of some member states to lifting the ban the collapse in their own consumer confidence? Does that not put us in a Catch-22 position, in that, to raise confidence in these countries, we need to lift the ban; yet to lift the ban, we need to raise confidence?

Should not one part of our strategy be a massive information and propaganda exercise in other member states—this has been suggested by representatives of the farming interests and by hon. Members from all parties—to tell those states exactly what we are doing, why it has dealt with the problem and why our beef is safe? May I put it to the right hon. Genetleman that farmers in this country—*[Interruption.]* Many farmers are deeply concerned about the situation, and would like some answers from the Prime Minister.

Is there not now a yawning discrepancy between what Ministers are saying about the current slaughter scheme and what the farming industry is saying? Reports from all parts of the country suggest that there is insufficient capacity in the abattoirs, confusion in the list of approved abattoirs, problems with collection centres, inadequate cold storage and uncertainty about the details of compensation. Does the Prime Minister agree that that situation cannot possibly be tolerated any longer?

Is not the incompetence with which the scheme is now being administered of a piece with the serial incompetence that has characterised the Government's handling of BSE? Is it not true that, throughout the early 1990s and late 1980s, the Government utterly failed to take action on BSE, although constant warnings were being given by Opposition Members that they had to act? The Government's response has been too late at virtually every stage of the crisis. Whatever the purpose of the Prime Minister's statement today, it should not obscure the incompetence with which the issue has been handled by him.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that no attempt was made before the announcement on 20 March to speak either to the farming industry or to our European partners to warn them or to secure their agreement to the measures that were being taken? Can he imagine any other Government behaving in that way? Does he accept that, at every stage—the years up to March 1996, the announcement itself, the policy of the slaughter scheme and the conduct of negotiations—his Government have shown a talent for error? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr. Blair: We are entitled to ask questions about the Government's handling of the issue. These are the questions that are being asked outside this House. The Prime Minister has embarked on a new initiative today.

[Mr. Blair]

I assume that he has a clear understanding of what it will mean in practice. I certainly hope so, because otherwise he will make a serious situation even worse.

The Prime Minister: The leader of the Labour party has a great gift for hindsight, but very little for foresight. In all of that long, rambling address, he did not express a single opinion on how to handle the matter in any respect. In that, he was consistent with the approach of the Labour party from the outset of this national problem.

Let me answer those of the right hon. Gemtleman's questions that were clear. We are seeking a plan for a progressive lifting, and have already been discussing that with the Commission—starting with the beef derivatives and moving on progressively through herds that are clear of BSE, with a stepped lifting of the ban. That is under detailed discussion with the Commission.

On what I had in mind when I spoke about us not being able to reciprocate if we were not receiving good will and co-operation from Europe, I will be quite specific with the right hon. Gentleman and the House.

I do not believe that we will be able to agree any matters requiring unanimity until such time as we are able to agree on how to deal with this crisis with our European partners. I do not believe that we will be able to make progress at the intergovernmental conference, and any agreement that may be reached against our wishes at that stage we would reopen at the point at which we were again in a position to reach agreement with our partners. We will certainly take the issue to Florence and ensure that it dominates the proceedings at the Florence Council. There will not be co-operation with Europe until our partners in Europe are prepared to sit down and co-operate with us.

Mr. Blair: What does this mean?

The Prime Minister: I have just explained to the right hon. Gentleman. If he reads *Hansard*, he will find it perfectly clear. I am sorry that he is being quite so slow on this occasion.

As to what the right hon. Gentleman had to say about 20 March, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture did speak to Commissioner Fischler before the statements in the House. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that the question was leaked in a Labour-supporting newspaper on the morning of 12 March. We spent hours that morning discussing the matter with scientists, before doing what he would have condemned us for if we had not done—coming straight to the House to report on precisely what was happening. He tries to suggest at this stage that we should not have come to the House, but should have gone outside and tried to fix deals. I wonder what he would have had to say this afternoon about us ignoring the House if we had done so.

Right from the beginning of the affair, we have followed the scientific advice on public health that we have been given—followed it as any responsible Government must and should. What is so frustrating is that the right hon. Gentleman asks what we are discussing with our European partners, but in the discussions it has not yet proved possible to persuade some of those partners to engage seriously in debate on the decisions that need to be taken.

We are ready for that debate; some of our European partners are not. That is why we are taking the approach that we have taken this afternoon. It is necessary that they consider the problem seriously so that we can find a way through. Until they consider this problem, we shall be unable to consider other matters that are of interest and concern to them.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Since beef consumption has been affected to a greater degree in the European Union than in this country, does it not make sense that it is in the interests of the EU countries to lift the ban as soon as possible, and that, above all, a decision should be based on scientific evidence and not on populism to do with their national electorates? That being the case, does it not make sense that any progress must be made through hard negotiation, and that nothing whatever will be achieved by threats of our leaving the EU?

The Prime Minister: Yes, there is no suggestion of our leaving the European Union, or, indeed, of indulging in actions that would be illegal before the British courts or the European Court. That is not what we are seeking to do. We need to continue with the negotiations, but it is essential that we are able to persuade our partners properly to negotiate on the details of how we proceed, and that, as yet, we have been unable to persuade all of them to do. Some of our European partners and the Commission have been, in many respects, extremely understanding and helpful, but we need to ensure that that extends right across the European Union, so that we can reach an agreed way forward.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Does the Prime Minister find any irony in the fact that the Government's hopes now rest in the operation of the majority voting system—something that they are determined to get rid of, or diminish, in the forthcoming IGC? Does he find any irony in the fact that the Government's first action in this matter is to run to the European Court of Justice—something that his Back Benchers want to get rid of and whose power some of his Cabinet Ministers want to diminish? Having listened to the Prime Minister's statement today, most people will conclude that the Euro-sceptic minority on his Back Benches has taken control of the Government's foreign policy, and that this has much more to do with appeasing them than restoring confidence in the beef market.

Does the Prime Minister realise that one reason why our European partners have so little confidence in the operation of the BSE eradication scheme is that it has sunk into disorder, confusion, chaos, farce and fiasco? Abattoirs across the country have been ringing me and my hon. Friends this morning to say that they are withdrawing from it.

As a specific example, St. Merryn Meat in Cornwall last week killed one fifth of the national cull under the BSE eradication scheme. Its operational viability has been on the basis of 1,750 head of cattle every week. Yesterday, that was reduced to 800, without compensation, notice or consultation. In consequence, the abattoir is liable to become economically non-viable and

close down, which would make 400 people redundant—and perhaps another 200 in two or three weeks' time. That is the direct result of the chaos that the Government have inflicted on agriculture, and it is one of the reasons why Europe has no confidence in them.

The Prime Minister: I can only say, after listening to his question, that, if abattoirs are ringing the right hon. Gentleman, I dare say they were soliciting for custom.

The right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the European Court show vividly how little he understands about either the policy we have set out or the European Court. We support the European Court and its proper responsibility in applying the single market; it is essential. What we oppose is the reinterpretation of laws by the European Court and its extension of laws, as in the Advocate-General's recent opinion on the working time directive. It is those matters that we are seeking to change.

The right hon. Gentleman may wish for a progressive determination of law by the European Court outside this country, but it is our wish for it to interpret laws that this House has agreed, not to determine laws by the extension of previous case law, which is what it has been doing. If he does not understand that, it explains why he is in favour of a federal Europe, which very few people in this country would wish to see.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement merits strong support throughout the House? Is he confident that his fellow Heads of State and Heads of Government, especially Chancellor Kohl, understand fully the tremendous political damage that has been done by their intemperate actions over the past eight weeks?

The Prime Minister: I very much hope that that point will be clear. I am seeking a proper dialogue and agreement: I am not seeking confrontation. I wish to find a way through that enables the British beef industry to return to what it was—one of the healthiest and best beef industries in the world. To ensure that there is proper negotiation, it is necessary to tell our partners that we no longer believe that the way in which the negotiations have been proceeding is satisfactory. That is the purpose of this statement. I shall certainly emphasise my hon. Friend's points to my fellow Heads of Government, although I think that it will be apparent to them from the statement.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In disregard of the cackling of the chappies behind him on this serious issue, and, of course, with requisite respect, does the Prime Minister not realise that his handling of this matter is not going to achieve the aims that he thinks? Does he realise that the tactic of the empty chair, in his person, will not achieve the stature of the action that a de Gaulle might have achieved?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. I have not said that we will leave an empty chair and not be there; I have said that we will not agree matters that need to be determined by unanimity. We will be there, to ensure that this issue is raised on each and every occasion, so that people are aware of what is necessary. An empty chair would achieve nothing—the hon. Gentleman may be right about that. We will be there to argue the case of the British beef industry on every occasion.

That is the point that is really at issue. Forget all the extraneous matters that are sometimes raised; what is of concern to me is getting a proper agreement with our partners that can remove this ban and restore the health to the British beef industry that science says it should have. Science is on our side. Science is being rejected by our European Union partners, and we must make it clear to them that that is not acceptable.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although his statement is very welcome in tone, in order for us to be able to bring substantial pressure to bear in the run-up to Florence, it would be helpful to have another look at whether the suspension of payments would be illegal? Does he accept, moreover, that all that that would result in is a modest increase in interest that we might have to pay; whereas, if we did impose such a suspension of payments, it would bring the other members firmly to the negotiating table, as my right hon. Friend wants?

The Prime Minister: I have to tell my hon. Friend that it would involve breaking the law, and it would not be a question of having to face the European Court of Justice; it would, within a matter of days, be a question of having to face the courts in this country. For that reason and others, I am not attracted to measures that are illegal.

First, as we believe that the British beef industry is being unfairly treated, I do not think that we would help its case by an illegal act that would entrench opposition abroad. Secondly, I do not believe that it would be appropriate, because in any event the law is against us, and it would not be effective. That is why I have chosen the measures that I have announced this afternoon.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The lifting of the ban depends on the confidence of the European Commission, the standing veterinary committee and others that the BSE eradication programme is right and proper. How can that confidence be enhanced when the Minister of Agriculture behaves like a demented gambler in the last chance saloon, offering to double the number of cattle that might be culled, directly contrary to the scientific evidence he cites, which suggests that only the right number of cattle should be culled?

In those circumstances, why does not the Prime Minister do as he offered to do some days ago, personally take charge of this, and hold a European summit with other colleagues in Europe—or is he afraid to lose there as well?

The Prime Minister: We shall be having a European summit in Florence, and, as I have told the House, this will be the main issue on its agenda if it is not solved before then. A great deal of negotiation and discussion on science and other matters needs to be undertaken. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture has been discussing those matters in Europe and, daily, domestically, not only with the agricultural industry but with all the allied interests that have a direct interest in the beef industry as a whole.

There are two elements. The first and most important element is that it is in the interests of the British beef industry for us to determine a way to eradicate BSE. Forget any pressure that may be put on us by other people

[The Prime Minister]

or the ban by other people. If we forget that and put it entirely to one side, it is in the long-term interests of the British beef industry to eradicate BSE, so that there is world confidence in British beef. That is what we are doing, and we are not being subjected to undue pressure from other people about that. We are looking ourselves at what needs to be done and how best it shall be done.

In terms of slaughtering those animals that need slaughtering, about 38,000 have been slaughtered, and the slaughterhouses are moving towards capacity. I will, of course, look into the particular case that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) mentioned, but they are moving towards capacity. We have to look at that in our own interests and in the interests of our own industry.

So this is not just a matter of a disagreement with our European partners, important though that is, because they have imposed the ban. Quite separately from that, we need to look domestically at how we get rid of BSE, and that is what we are doing.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Is the Prime Minister aware that the statement he has made today will be greatly welcomed and strongly supported by the British people right across the nation, and that they will have noted with distaste the fact that, at a moment of national crisis, the leaders of the two Opposition parties have shown themselves incapable of speaking for Britain?

The Prime Minister: I think that what my hon. Friend has had to say will find a echo in every part of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Exactly what is the Prime Minister proposing? He is wiping out the beef industry, including the veterinary section and the slaughterhouses, in my constituency, so it is bizarre to hear him seriously say that he intends to implement sanctions, without making it clear what they are. It is even stranger to hear him say that he intends to go to a court which he himself has labelled wholly political, unacceptable and irresponsible. If that is his solution to the problem, I am not surprised that the whole farming community in my constituency is in despair.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady understands so little that she tells the people in her constituency what she has just told this House, I am not surprised that they are in despair—it is probably with her. I have already answered each of her three questions at least once.

My purpose is to save the British beef industry. I just wish that some Opposition Members would stand up for it for once.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): My right hon. Friend will know only too well how much the president of the National Farmers Union and all farmers in this country welcome the strong links that he has established with them over the past eight weeks. Can he assure me that the link will be directly maintained with the president of the NFU? Can he further assure me that we will not up the ante in the slaughter policy week by week in the vain hope of attracting support in Europe? Finally, will my right hon. Friend give the lead in a "buy British" campaign in this country?

The Prime Minister: From what I have seen, I think that many people have already followed that last piece of advice. I have nothing but praise for the way Sir David Naish, Mr. Ben Gill and the leaders of the farmers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have behaved throughout. The whole agriculture industry has behaved with great restraint and maturity. I am grateful for the advice that it has given us. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend's door is open to representatives of the industry at any time; so is mine, whenever that should prove necessary.

No one is proposing a wholesale slaughter of herds just to satisfy the wishes of people overseas. That proposition is not under consideration. The science does not support such a proposition, as my right hon. and learned Friend has repeatedly stated in Europe and the United Kingdom.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Will the Prime Minister confirm that he sees a verification scheme as a clear path towards the complete lifting of the ban? Given that such a scheme has existed for a good number of years in Northern Ireland, will he consider asking our European partners to lift the ban in respect of that region of the United Kingdom, if only as a test of good faith?

The Prime Minister: There is indeed a good verification scheme in Northern Ireland. We seek to ensure a proper verification scheme across the United Kingdom—that is one component in the progressive lifting of the ban to which I referred earlier. I shall certainly take note of what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my right hon. Friend dismiss the brazen effrontery of the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats today? Will he accept that this country owes a great debt to our farming industry, which has served us well in times of crisis? We should stand by it now.

Will my right hon. Friend accept that, when dealing with the European Union, we are dealing not with our partners but with our competitors, and that that should always be borne in mind? This afternoon, my right hon. Friend has spoken for Britain.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with him about the agriculture industry. I can certainly confirm that we stand by the British beef industry, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Prime Minister recognise that the past few days' negotiations have shown that simply asking Europe to accept an increase in the culling programme will not be enough and that we really need the over-30-months slaughter scheme to be fully operational throughout Britain? In Wales, for example, only 700 cattle were slaughtered last week and this week the figure should increase to at least 2,000 to 2,500. Does he recognise that, when our European partners can see that the scheme is fully operational, it will be far easier to persuade them to lift the partial ban?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman sets out precisely the matters that we have been discussing with officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Cabinet Office in Brussels in the past week or so and at the innumerable meetings that my right hon. and learned

Friend has attended. Each and every matter that the hon. Gentleman has just raised has been among those that were discussed with the Commission and our European partners. It is precisely because we have discussed all those matters, yet we are still unable to determine what further is sought by the European Union from the United Kingdom before it will lift the ban, that there is such frustration over those negotiations.

I did not lightly come to the House this afternoon. I brought the measures to the House because there is deep frustration over the nature of the discussions and the fact that, when we make proposals, there is no clear indication whether they are acceptable or, if not, in which areas they are unacceptable. It is no good our partners making demands of us and not sitting down and discussing with us precisely what those demands should be.

For those reasons of frustration, we have felt it necessary to illustrate the importance that we attach to these matters and say that, until our European partners are prepared to sit down and discuss them in detail with us as they affect Wales, Northern Ireland and England, and the Aberdeen Angus industry in Scotland, we shall be unable to sit down and discuss with them other matters that are dear to them. That is why we shall block matters that require unanimity.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Over the last eight weeks, Ministers—in particular, my right hon. and learned Friend—have shown extraordinary patience with our European partners, and we have seen hopes raised time after time only to be dashed again 24 hours later. Therefore, is it not clear that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has come to the House this afternoon to make this most welcome statement as a result of the fact that on these Benches, I hope elsewhere in the House, and also in the countryside, that patience with our European partners has now rapidly evaporated?

Is it not also clear that the response of the Leader of the Opposition shows not only that he is confused, because that I think we are familiar with, but that he is, on this subject, frankly rattled?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's generous words about my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): That will not save him.

The Prime Minister: A non-farmer speaks. In many cases, my right hon. and learned Friend has been the whipping boy for frustration, but I know the efforts that he has made to determine a way through a particularly difficult problem and to represent the interests of the farming industry. When he reports to the House in a few moments, they will see again his efforts on behalf of Britain.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Prime Minister recall that, when he was asked precisely what the sanctions were, he said that Ministers would raise the matter at every meeting? Does that imply that they have not been doing that already during the past eight weeks?

The Prime Minister also said that he would get in touch with all the various leaders. They have been trotting across here to Britain in the past few weeks. The Prime Minister has invited President Chirac over here and filled him full of beef. He also had Helmut Kohl over here. It says something about the Prime Minister's influence with those leaders that he invited them over here, he wined and dined them, and then they voted against him—or they got somebody else to do their dirty work.

The Prime Minister should realise that the Common Market is now moving from social issues to economic and political issues. It is now dealing with issues on a political level. Why does he not have the guts to do the only thing he can do? When I used to negotiate with the pit manager, I would threaten to stop the wheels. If he had any guts, he would tell the people in the Common Market that we will stop the flow of money. That is the only real sanction he has.

The Prime Minister: It is always good to hear from new Labour.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): That is insulting.

The Prime Minister: I could not comment about that. However, I hope that it is duly noted that Opposition Members below the Gangway consider it an insult to be referred to as "new Labour".

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says that European leaders have been over here, I have wined and dined them and then they have gone home and voted against us. But President Chirac voted for us. The hon. Gentleman makes one assertion, and he gets it wrong. It is good to see that old Labour is alive and kicking, if not thinking. *[Interruption.]* I must say, it is very instructive to watch the body language above and below the Gangway. I hope that the cameras are pointed in that direction.

I must refer to some of the hon. Gentleman's omissions. He forgot to mention that we said that we would block all measures requiring unanimity—a number of which will come up in the next few weeks. He forgot that we said that we would block progress in the intergovernmental conference. The IGC cannot reach a conclusion without unanimity, so it cannot reach a conclusion unless this matter is completely determined. Neither will the present agenda at the foreign summit proceed unless it deals with the beef question.

Apparently none of those facts reached the hon. Gentleman. He clearly was not listening earlier, so I hope that he is listening now. *[Interruption.]* He may listen, but I fear that he does not understand.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): In his words today, my right hon. Friend clearly identifies with the frustrations felt by many of my constituents who work in the agriculture and food processing industries. They recognise the need for dialogue in Europe. Their frustrations have grown in the past two months, and their lives have been totally disrupted. It is now time to make a stand, and they will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That statement presages a renewed attempt to reach agreement by negotiation. As my hon. Friend says, we are acting in the interests of the beef and allied industries, and we want to solve the problem as speedily as we can.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), has the Prime Minister noticed that Farming Ministers in three of the countries that voted against Britain yesterday—Germany, the Netherlands and Spain—have expressed an interest in the position of specialist beef herds, particularly those in Scotland and in Northern Ireland? The Prime Minister mentioned that in his statement.

I ask that the argument about specialist beef herds be put at the forefront of the United Kingdom strategy because it seems to offer a practical way forward. Eight weeks into the crisis, will the right hon. Gentleman instruct the Scottish Office to accelerate work on the verification schemes, which would allow us to trade on the reputation of Scottish beef and lead all beef back into European markets?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is quite right: the verification schemes are very important. We are accelerating progress on those schemes, not only in Scotland but elsewhere in the United Kingdom where there are no proper schemes in place. The point he raises is at the forefront of the negotiations.

I repeat that we are prepared to sit down and reach an agreement that will lead to a proper framework for lifting the ban comprehensively. However, other people must sit down with us. If they are not prepared to accept our offer to sit down and engage in constructive dialogue in order to bridge the difference between us, and if they simply say—as they have done—"We do not think what you are proposing is sufficient," but will not then engage in proper dialogue about what is sufficient, it is not a two-way dialogue.

I wish to obtain that two-way dialogue. It is largely frustration over that matter that has led to our decision to elevate the political imperative of reaching agreement on the issue for the farming industry.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): My right hon. Friend's robust response today will get a wide welcome in the country, not least in the agricultural community. Is he aware, however, that, if the United Kingdom were to offer an increased cull of cattle beyond what is absolutely necessary, it would cause grave damage not only to the acceptability in the country of what we are doing but to our future milk and beef supplies? Those aspects must be considered, too.

The Prime Minister: I should like to deal with that point, because I know that it is a matter of concern to some of my hon. Friends.

I say emphatically that our proposals do not envisage culling whole herds in which BSE cases have occurred; that would not be justified on the science. The original proposal for a selective cull was based on identifying cases of BSE in cattle born between 1990 and 1993 and to cull cattle born on the same farms at the same time—which therefore might reasonably have been expected to be exposed to the same infected feed. That was broadly estimated to lead to the culling of about 40,000 cattle. Further proposals would extend that to cover only cases of BSE that are confirmed in the future. In the interests of eradication, we would need to deal with those cases of BSE as well.

Those are the matters to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture referred last week, and not to a general slaughter of healthy cattle. I should like to make that point clear to the House, because it is a matter that has caused some concern among some of my hon. Friends and among the farming industry. I hope that the position is now clear. The proposals cover only cases of BSE that are confirmed in future.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Before the Prime Minister launches a war of bull semen against Europe, will he answer one simple question? Given the market signals from the United States, which banned British beef in 1987, from Westminster council, which stopped serving it in its schools a couple of years ago, and from Hong Kong, which banned British beef about two years ago, what retaliation does he propose to take against them?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should not sneer at an important industry.

Mr. MacShane: I was not sneering.

The Prime Minister: At the beginning of his question, he was sneering at an important industry. There is no doubt that he was sneering. People will have noticed that he was doing so, and they will have noticed many Labour Members' attitude on this issue.

We are seeking to have the ban lifted everywhere. We will be in discussion with Hong Kong, America, New Zealand, Australia and other countries that have previously banned British beef or beef derivative products. That is the reason why we are trying to deal comprehensively domestically with cases of BSE—so that there can be no credible shred of justification anywhere in the world for the ban on British beef.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his measured but forceful statement, and assure him that it will be welcomed by butchers, farmers and meat traders across my constituency. May I ask him to acknowledge that he is starting down a road of forceful but restrained escalation, and that, until there is a happy resolution to this matter, there can be no turning back?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right. I did not lightly embark upon this course, and I am perfectly aware that we must proceed with this course until we have a satisfactory outcome.

Agriculture Council

4.22 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): With permission, I should like to make a statement on the discussion about BSE at and in the margins of the Agriculture Council on 20 and 21 May, at which I represented the United Kingdom with my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, and my noble Friends the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Office and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

The standing veterinary committee voted late last night on a proposal that could have been expected, in due course, to bring about the lifting of the ban on gelatine, tallow and semen. However, a qualified majority was not established. Forty-eight votes—representing eight member states, including the United Kingdom—voted in favour, and 39 votes, representing seven member states, voted against.

This morning, the Commissioner informed the Council that the Commission would put the proposal to the Council. A special meeting of the Council to consider that and other matters will be held on 3 and 4 June. Under the procedures, the proposal will then be implemented, unless there is a simple majority against it in the Council.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has explained, it is extremely disappointing that no final decision has been taken on lifting the ban on those three products, for which the scientific case is overwhelming. The Council meeting fixed for 3 and 4 June provides a further opportunity, which should be taken.

I also explained to the Council the comprehensive nature of the measures that the United Kingdom has put in place to protect the public and to eliminate BSE. On the idea of a selective cull, I confirmed that the United Kingdom was in principle prepared to cull all animals in the three age classes 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93, identified by farm of origin, in respect of which a case of BSE had been found. I made it clear, however, that such a proposal would need the consent of the House, and that the opinion of right hon. and hon. Members would be influenced by what was said and done in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe. I have seen no evidence to justify going beyond the proposal that we have advanced.

The Government's first duty is to protect the public. We have put the necessary measures in place, as is confirmed by any unprejudiced and careful reading of the scientific evidence. Member states should now accept their responsibilities, and agree to a rapid ending of the ban.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): May I reiterate that we fully share the Government's bitter disappointment at the failure of the standing veterinary committee even to agree to the modest proposal for the lifting of the ban on tallow, gelatine and semen?

Does the Minister feel that the confusion surrounding the implementation of the 30-month slaughter programme contributed to his lack of progress? May I remind him that it is seven weeks since he took that programme to the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg? Is it not clear that there is still great confusion throughout the industry about its implementation? Indeed, divisions are developing between different sections of the industry. Is it not time to consider whether some new initiatives are required in relation to the programme if it is to operate effectively?

May I put to the Minister the allegation that some abattoirs are refusing to take cattle aged over 30 months, thus forcing farmers to sell them in markets where the abattoir owners or their agents are able to buy the cattle at knockdown prices and make a profit at the expense of farmer and taxpayer? Is the Minister still certain that he is right in requiring that cattle for our food and cattle aged over 30 months that must be slaughtered and kept out of the food chain be slaughtered in the same slaughterhouses?

As for the additional selective slaughter programme—the programme that still involved 40,000 cattle at the time of last Thursday's debate; the Minister upped the figure to 80,000 on Friday—can the Minister explain clearly what is the proposal's current status? Is he saying that we will not go ahead with the second slaughter programme until we have a clear agreement on a timetable for the lifting of the overall ban on our beef and beef products?

The Prime Minister accused my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—most unfairly—of not making constructive suggestions. May I ask the Minister what progress has been made on three of our constructive suggestions? First, what progress is being made on the quality assurance scheme for late-maturing cattle, and will the Government extend such schemes to other beef breeds?

Secondly, has the Minister had a chance further to consider our call for an investigation into the 67 per cent. of BSE cases that are now in cattle born after the feed bans were implemented? He has acknowledged that after those bans were put in place in 1989 cattle have consumed a continuous stream of contaminated feed. Surely it would help the introduction of an additional slaughter programme if we were to identify the cattle most at risk. If we were to carry out an inquiry, it might help us to have a more closely targeted selective slaughter programme.

Thirdly, with regard to the proposal made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) a few minutes ago, will the Minister seriously consider the proposition that many people in countries such as Germany may not fully understand the measures that have been put in place in this country and that we should seek to address that by directly communicating to them—through people who speak their language in the media or in a clear booklet—what we are doing in the United Kingdom? We argue that proposition on the basis that there has been a return of confidence—not complete, but substantial—in the market in British beef, and that may partly be because the people understand that the Government are taking measures following the announcement on 20 March.

The Government are right to emphasise the importance of lifting the ban on our export of beef and beef products, because only then can we start to rebuild our markets. But that must not deflect the Minister from the priorities at home, including ensuring that all the measures to keep the BSE agent out of our food are effectively enforced and addressing the huge problems surrounding the slaughter programme, which are causing such suffering among farmers and others in the industry.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. In following the policy of slaughtering cattle over

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the age of 30 months, to date about 38,500 beasts have been slaughtered. The standing veterinary committee did not focus to any great extent on that slaughter policy. My judgment is that the objections that have been advanced in the standing veterinary committee and elsewhere are primarily political in character, although scientific language is used as a cover for a political stance.

Further to the question of the slaughter policy, we are now operating very close to current capacity. We can increase capacity, as we discussed last week, by bringing on cold storage and additional incineration. The choke point is essentially the rendering capacity. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) mentioned specific allegations about behaviour bordering on misconduct, if not misconduct. If there are such cases, I hope that they will be brought to my attention.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explained the position on additional slaughter, but perhaps I should repeat it. We are focusing on three class years, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93. If—in any of those class years—there has been a case or there is a case of BSE, we will go back to the farm of origin and find and slaughter the cohort. It is the future cases that I have introduced into the discussion in Europe.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East asked about the context in which the selective slaughter policy has been introduced. I have already made it plain to the Council in Brussels and to the Commission too that the proposals for a selective cull have to be considered in the context of programmes for relaxing the ban. Indeed, I said today at the Council that to secure a selective cull policy I would have to have the consent of the House of Commons. In truth, the House's opinion will be directly influenced by what is said and done in Europe, and I made that very clear to the Council today.

We completed consultation on the quality assurance scheme at the end of last week. We have now raised it with the Commission and the Commissioner himself specifically mentioned it to the Council this morning.

The hon. Gentleman will remember that last Thursday we discussed cattle born after the ban. The relevant figures are to be found in the dossiers that we have lodged with the Library. He will bear it in mind that, from the beginning of April, we placed a total prohibition on the incorporation of any mammalian protein in farm rations—food going to any farm animals.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have to safeguard the business of the House. Hon. Members who might be fortunate enough to be called on this statement should ask their questions briskly, and only one each. I am sure that the Minister will oblige by giving a speedy answer. Who rose on the previous statement and was not called?

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that hundreds of farmers in my constituency will be delighted at the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in standing up to those of our European partners who do not have the slightest intention of lifting the ban on the export of beef, whatever offers we may make to try to win their support? Those farmers are asking exactly how much European beef we are importing and why on earth we do not require as high a standard of quality in that beef as the Europeans require of British beef. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that would be not retaliation but justifiable action in defence of British beef producers?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful for my hon. and learned Friend's support. He made an important point about extending to Europe the specified bovine material controls that we now operate in countries where there are cases of BSE. We are raising that matter with the Commission. He asked about the importation into the United Kingdom of beef from European Union countries. The position is that cattle over the age of 30 months are affected by the general restriction now in place.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In view of the Prime Minister's reference to the National Farmers Union and the tribute that he paid, rightly, to its responsible attitude, is the Minister aware that in its briefing today it has said that the

"30-month scheme is in jeopardy"

and that "chaos reigns"? Is he aware that while he has been abroad a number of abattoirs, as a result of the chopping and changing of the intervention board, have threatened to get out of the scheme? Is he confident that, far from being in a state of growing deterioration, the scheme will be on stream by the next meeting of the Agriculture Council and that he will be able to report that, in his own words, the "necessary measures" are in place?

Mr. Hogg: As I have already said on a number of occasions, to date we have slaughtered about 38,500 head of cattle over the age of 30 months; the estimate for 21 May is that we will have slaughtered about an additional 4,188. I have seen reports in which supermarkets have said that they do not wish to take clean cattle for consumption from abattoirs that have been used for the cull. I discussed that point with the retailers last week.

I do not believe that that judgment is based on good science. However, if any abattoirs withdraw from the culling scheme, I believe that we will be able to fill the gap and to continue slaughtering at the capacity that is afforded by the renderers, as topped up by incineration and the cold storage facilities that we are bringing on stream.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, until eight weeks ago, the standing veterinary committee based its decisions on scientific facts and veterinary practice? Is not it an absolute disgrace and an indictment of their professional capacity that some of those vets have changed their minds on the orders of their political masters? Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, if the principle of science and veterinary practice is not stuck to, when this whole sorry mess is over there will be an opening for the manipulation of food and other materials for reasons of disease, simply covering over bad trade practices, which the committee was designed to stop?

Mr. Hogg: There is much force in what my hon. Friend says. In some cases, the language of science has been used to advance political objectives or to conceal political

positions. I agree that, when forming policy, it is extremely important, as a general principle, to follow the science; otherwise, there is no clear benchmark.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the Minister confirm that he has heard reports that supermarket chains' meat buyers are considering not buying supplies from abattoirs that are participating in the culling of animals under this scheme? If those reports are true, will he have urgent talks with the heads of the supermarket chains to point out that there is no scientific basis for that fear and that their best contribution to enhancing consumer confidence in British beef's safety would be to recognise that the disease is not contagious in those circumstances?

Mr. Hogg: I touched on this point in answering the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). Last week—on Thursday night, I think—I discussed this very issue with supermarket representatives. There is no good reason why supermarkets should not take beef for consumption from abattoirs that are also being used for culling, provided there is a clear distinction in time and that appropriate measures are in place. It is worth reminding the House that the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee originally contemplated that, provided it was sold in a deboned state, beef from cattle over 30 months of age would be sold for human consumption.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that a problem with the slaughter policy is that cattle have been earmarked for abattoirs but have not been able to go until perhaps the following week? The cost to farmers is running into hundreds of pounds. Is it not about time that we appointed someone—an individual of substance and quality—to oversee the policy? Should we not have a system whereby the discrepancy between the live weight and the dead weight is removed, so that abattoirs and marts operate on equal terms?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend might be reassured to know that, under the 30-month scheme, the cumulative total of cattle slaughtered in Scotland between 3 May and 21 May amounts to 9,997 beasts. The House will, of course, know that we do not possess powers of direction. We must rely on persuasion, negotiation and encouragement.

Mr. Walker: And advice.

Mr. Hogg: And advice. That is what is being done. If there are ways of reinforcing that process, we will gladly consider them.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): What consideration has the Minister given to the Consumer Association's suggestion today—following a poll showing that 71 per cent. of people believe that the Government withheld important information about BSE's risks—that an independent food authority should be set up?

Mr. Hogg: I do not agree with the criticism and I do not agree with the proposal.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of some farmers' concern that dealers are doing sweetheart deals with abattoirs and are seeking to pick up cheap cattle from farmers who cannot get their cattle into the abattoir? Is he aware of the concern that some cattle will be able to get into the scheme under existing rates, but that other farmers, because of the difficulty of getting cattle to the abattoir in time, might lose out on the existing deal? Will he ensure that farmers who, through no fault of their own, are delayed in getting their cattle slaughtered receive exactly the same compensation as farmers who get in earlier?

Mr. Hogg: I understand my hon. Friend's points. On cattle that are not able to get into the abattoirs, my hon. Friend the Minister of State has made clear our position about the top-up payment being carried forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) will recall that on Thursday my hon. Friend the Minister of State outlined our thinking on an advance payment ultimately to be made under the slaughter scheme. That will provide considerable reassurance to the farmers of whom my hon. Friend speaks.

We are increasing slaughterhouse throughput under the 30-month scheme. We are operating very near to capacity, but it can be increased as we bring cold storage facilities into play and perhaps identify further disposal methods—incineration, for example.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): A rather bizarre auction is taking place: the 40,000 figure was raised to 80,000 and then rejected by the European Community, some of the members of which want perhaps 10 times that figure. That is not based on good science. What is the Ministry's best estimate of BSE's incidence in the present cattle herd? Is it under 1 per cent, perhaps 5 per cent. or up to 10 per cent?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that it is sensible to answer the question in the form that it has been asked, but I can give the hon. Gentleman some idea of how many confirmed cases we expect. He will find our best estimate of likely figures in the dossier that we have placed in the Library, but I do not have the figures in front of me so I shall use broad figures. If we were to do nothing else by way, for example, of a selective cull, in the current year we expect about 8,500 cases, next year about 5,000 and in 1998 about 2,800. At the height of the epidemic in 1993 there were about 36,000 confirmed cases, which fell to about 15,000 last year.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, at times like these, we need to know who our friends are? Will he therefore say which countries said that they would support us but reneged on that commitment in the vote? Bearing in mind the earlier welcome and bullish approach of the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box, will my right hon. and learned Friend support immediate action to protect the UK consumer on health grounds by banning imported beef and beef products from cattle that have not been raised, transported or slaughtered to the same high standards and welfare as are practised in this country?

Mr. Hogg: I think that I would turn my hon. Friend's point on its head by saying that no beef product in the world is created and produced in a better environment, or is subject to better and more sophisticated controls,

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than British beef. One can honestly say that British beef is produced under the most rigorous controls anywhere in the world.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister has given assurances that the slaughter policy is near capacity: it is a mere trickle in Wales, which is a considerable worry to many thousands of farmers.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is a disaster.

Mr. Llwyd: Yes, a disaster.

May I impress on the Minister the need for far more cold storage? Will he impress on the intervention board the need for that to be provided urgently?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right in the sense that the throughput in Wales has been less than we would wish: about 1,000 beasts have been slaughtered under the 30-month scheme. Clearly, it needs to be accelerated and I agree that cold storage is a partial solution to the problem.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Is not the grotesquely irrational response from European politicians rather depressing? Was any quantitative analysis made, comparing the risks of different forms of human activity, to put the matter in perspective when it was discussed in the Council? For example, is it not a far greater risk to get into one's car to drive to the supermarket to buy beef than, even on the most pessimistic assumptions of alarmists, it is to eat it? There is therefore an even greater case for banning all forms of motorised transport throughout Europe than there is for banning British beef.

Mr. Hogg: It has always been one of the problems that it is extraordinarily difficult to express risk in terms that are readily understood. That is why, when pressed on that point, Professor Pattison has said that, to use ordinary language, British beef is safe. That is the way in which he prefers to express risk and I endorse that approach. My hon. Friend is right about the depressing character of some of the conversations that we have had on this subject in recent months. In truth, usually the language is not that of considered judgment based on fact, argument or science, but rather an expression of concern about damage to domestic markets, which is then expressed in language of science. I do not think that that is the proper way around.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): The right hon. and learned Gentleman must realise that the problem is as bad in Germany—in fact, worse. Confidence in beef in Germany dropped dramatically after the Germans banned British beef, because it raised the possibility of beef not being safe. If the proposals to ban foreign beef were taken up, we would once again undermine the very beef market that we are trying to maintain in this country. It is a matter of consumer confidence. Supermarkets do not buy beef from abattoirs that participate in the culling scheme not because of science, facts or figures, but because they fear that they cannot sell the beef. Lifting the European ban does not matter if we cannot convince people.

Mr. Hogg: It is true that the consumption of beef in Germany has been gravely damaged. I have frequently said to German Ministers that it would help confidence in Germany enormously if the ban were lifted. It would be an expression of confidence in beef generally. To put the argument differently, the fact that every time the Agriculture Council meets there is a row about the safety of beef is bound to have a deleterious effect on confidence in Germany and, indeed, in other countries of the Union where there has been a substantial reduction in consumption. I make those points to Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I warmly congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his conduct in negotiations and on what he has said today. He has struck a bell that is in tune with what the British people want. Are our European partners aware that the House of Commons will not accept ever-increasing senseless culls, which are unjustified by science, and that the British taxpayer will not accept the bankrolling of an institution that acts irrationally? Will he reassure me on a local point, which I put to him in the agriculture debate last week, about the availability of abattoir facilities to local beef farmers?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and neighbour—indeed, my constituency Member. He is entirely right to say that the consent of the House of Commons is absolutely essential if a selective cull policy is to be adopted. I have made that very clear to the Council today and on a number of previous occasions. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the lack of local abattoir facilities. I saw a number of farmers from our area on Friday and was able to say that very shortly an abattoir would be operating in Lincolnshire.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that nobody could have done more—day and often night—as a Minister for the farming industry than he has? Opposition Members' criticism is purely party political and not a matter of fact.

The beef breeder, who will obviously still lose money in getting his animal to be culled at top weight, is terribly worried that he cannot get his animals through the abattoirs. He is having to feed the animals and might still be three, four or five weeks away from getting them to the abattoir, which is costing more and more. Is it not possible for the animals to go to market and be weighed and tagged so that the farmer does not have to continue feeding them with feedstuffs? The animals can be put out to grass and their weight allowed to fall—they are to be culled and incinerated anyway. Farmers would not therefore lose more money by pursuing a policy that cannot be in their interests or necessarily in the interests of the policy that my right hon. and learned Friend is trying to promote.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind personal remarks: such remarks from one of the most senior Members of the House are particularly welcome. He is making an important and interesting suggestion on which I had not previously reflected. I shall consider what he has said. I suspect that the logistical problems would be too great; none the less, I shall consider his specific suggestion. I also draw to his

attention the concept of advance payments and our policy of operating slaughterhouses at their maximum, which I hope will go some way to meeting his constituency point.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Does the Minister agree that although his policy of culling a particular cohort when reactor or BSE cases are found in that cohort will do quite a lot to help the farm of origin, it has meant that the problem has spread to every farm where the cohort has been by trade and sale? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the suckler herdsman who buys one of those cattle will have a problem several months down the road when suckler calves from such a contact herd go to market? Will he carefully consider how we are going to deal with that policy, since the suckler herdsman depends not on milk sales but on his calves and the subsidies that he receives every year?

Mr. Hogg: I am sure that if we pursue the cohort tracing policy that the hon. Gentleman has described we will encounter some difficulties. Broadly speaking, however, the concept is right. It is very difficult to think of any other concept that is underpinned by science and gives a proportionate result. I am glad that the Commission's advisers have supported that approach; it is our approach. I recognise that there may be some difficulties, but in trying to stand back, I commend the approach to right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to stick to the golden rule of slaughtering only the cattle for which there are genuine scientific reasons for doing so. There would be great anger among farmers and people in general if we were seen to be slaughtering perfectly healthy animals in large numbers simply to appease our so-called partners in Europe. There is still a fair amount of confusion on the ground about the system. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to do all that he can to ensure that his staff get things moving as quickly and efficiently as possible, and that most of all he ensures that farmers are regularly informed what is going on.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point when he says that we should do our utmost to ensure that the farming community is aware of all relevant facts and new developments—we shall certainly do our best. I recognise that very great anger could arise at any selective cull policy that did not seem to be proportionate or justified. The concept that we have introduced to trace cohorts is designed to identify the beasts that one could sensibly say are at a pronounced risk of developing BSE because there is a high likelihood that they have been fed contaminated foodstuffs. I cannot think of a better way of adopting a cull policy. I am prepared to argue in favour of a selective cull policy, and I think that many right hon. and hon. Members would support that approach were they to reflect in great detail on the scientific arguments underpinning it. I hope that my hon. Friend may feel able to do so as well.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister recall that in a debate last week I said that some abattoirs, including one in my constituency owned by Ben Elliott, were on the original list but were then, for some mysterious reason, taken off it? The only thing that had happened in the meantime was that somebody from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had asked, "Are you a member of the federation?" I got the clear impression that Mr. Ben Elliott, not being a member of the federation, or part of some kind of freemasonry—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): A closed shop.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, a closed shop. Ben Elliott was being penalised for not being a member. Representations have been made over the weekend. Ben Elliott can slaughter about 200 cows a day, and many farmers in the area, despite the fact that they do not agree with the cull, have to get rid of their animals, so can I have an assurance that he will be back on the list so that he can help to deal with the problem?

Mr. Hogg: I believe that that is the first time that I have ever heard the hon. Gentleman refer to a closed shop in a somewhat disparaging manner. I regard that as progress.

The problem is that we must slaughter at the maximum capacity, and that means linking abattoirs to renderers. It also means that we must not have too many abattoirs at the outset, because if we did we should not be making the most effective use of the rendering capacity. For that reason, the original number of abattoirs was reduced to 20 or 21. We have it in mind substantially to increase that figure, to about 40—next week, I think. I do not know whether the new list will include the abattoir that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), is considering that point, because the hon. Gentleman raised it with her in last Thursday's debate.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is apparently confusion in some abattoirs? One in my constituency, which is on his list, is not slaughtering because the intervention board will not provide it with the necessary information. Despite having made and sent 20 or 30 telephone calls and faxes, the abattoir has had only one reply in six weeks.

Secondly, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that it is now impossible to send barren cows to slaughter in some parts of the country? From a humane point of view it is distressing that because of bottlenecks, some injured animals cannot be slaughtered. Will he give that situation some thought?

Mr. Hogg: We have made provision for casualties, including injured cattle, although I am afraid that I cannot comment on the particular constituency case that my hon. Friend identified. I suggest that he raises it with the Minister of State, who has day-to-day charge of such matters in the Ministry.

The real problem is that we cannot give approval to every abattoir on the original list, because that would make for inefficient use of the rendering capacity. If we went down that road we would not be able to achieve the maximum throughput that I believe is the desired objective of all right hon. and hon. Members.

Points of Order

5.3 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you examine carefully the reply to the last question answered by the Secretary of State for Social Security during Social Security questions? Having spent the weekend with NATO listening to the Secretary-General and Carl Bildt talking about the tragedy of Bosnia, and the great part that ethnic cleansing and racism played in that terrible civil war, I believe that you will agree that racism such as we heard in that answer today has no part in the House or in our great democracy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I am sure that if Madam Speaker had heard anything that was out of order she would immediately have addressed the matter. Nevertheless, I shall ensure that the hon. Lady's point is brought to her attention.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a new point of order?

Mr. MacShane: On a new point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that, as one of the distinguished sportsmen in the House, you will have been outraged by today's report in the *Daily Mirror* about the treatment of Sir Alf Ramsey, who has not been invited to the England *v.* Switzerland game that will open the European championships—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's compliment; indeed, I played tennis this morning. Leaving that aside, I do not think that football managership has anything to do with Madam Speaker.

BILL PRESENTED

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2)

Mr. Paul Flynn, supported by Mr. Nick Ainger, Mr. George Foulkes, Mr. David Winnick, Ms Diane Abbott and Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, presented a Bill to impose national spending limits on political parties at parliamentary general elections: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 139.]

Licensing Act 1964 (Amendment)

5.4 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to remove the power of the relevant court to award costs in respect of a decision by licensing justices to grant a justices' licence, in cases where the unsuccessful objector is a properly constituted residents association.

The purpose of my Bill is to remove from courts the power to levy costs against those representing residents associations in opposing the award of justices' licences. Knowing the fate of most ten-minute Bills, I am especially glad to see that the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North–East (Mr. Kirkhope), has come to hear the presentation of my Bill, and I hope that he will listen to some of my arguments and consider whether something can be done to alleviate the problem encountered by some of my constituents.

I preface my remarks by saying that although the horrifying story that I am about to tell happened in Harrow, it could have happened anywhere—and that as a result of what happened in Harrow, it could now happen in anyone's constituency.

The background to the problem is the purchase of a British Rail sports ground at Headstone lane, in my constituency, by an organisation now known as Broadfield sports and social club. That is a cosy-sounding name that suggests people who want to do things for the local community and for people who play sport. But that is not the view of the local community, and it is not mine either.

We must take into account the fact that the organisation consists of people who operate under assumed names, and who disguised their sources of finance and concealed their objectives, as well as threatening local residents. They are an unsavoury bunch, and in my judgment, although regrettably not in the judgment of the Harrow licensing magistrates, they are unsuitable people to be running a club. Residents had every reason to question the application for a local licence. Local people were worried, and continue to be worried. I remind the House that the applicants lied about their ownership and obscured their intentions.

In the Harrow magistrates court a retired man, Frank Hayward, represented the Headstone residents association—a respected local residents association which I believe is the oldest in the borough—and two other families also represented local feeling. The applicants were represented by an array of expensive advisers, including a barrister. Of course, they were entitled to be so represented.

The licence was granted. I do not agree with that decision, but that was the judgment. Of course, the magistrates are entitled to make a judgment on the issues as they see them. The magistrates accepted the fact that the residents had put forward a bona fide case, yet the residents finished up with a bill totalling £1,000 in costs. The applicants wanted £5,000 in costs, and £500 was awarded against Mr. Hayward, £250 against Mr. Warburton and £250 against Mr. Way.

When I have spoken to magistrates from other areas no one has been able to recall another case in which that has happened. Indeed, the other magistrates to whom I spoke

were stunned that such a thing should have happened. In my judgment, the ramifications are serious. Because of what I regard as an irresponsible act on the part of Harrow magistrates, no residents association can now risk opposing a licence application. They have made this a high-risk activity.

Local residents received what I regard as threatening letters the night before the hearing from the Broadfield sports and social club, which said that the club would be applying for costs. I met a delegation from all the residents associations in Harrow. They want the matter to be sorted out, and they also want people in other parts of the country to know what a serious position they may be put in.

My Bill aims to protect community representatives when speaking for local people. It will remove the right of courts to levy costs against those representatives, and require courts to keep a list of residents associations that are properly constituted. That is not a big imposition. Councils do this already, as I know from my experience on a council. We do not want to protect a bunch of cronies or a few cranks who get together to oppose a proper licence application, but properly constituted residents associations who represent local people should be protected. Residents associations have a right to represent people, and people in turn have a right to have their views put for them against applicants, however expensively represented they may be, who may threaten local people.

The Bill is simple and direct, and it will not be a burden on legitimate licensees or anyone else in the legitimate trade, including the brewers. But it will give people in every community the right to be heard. I believe that they demand and need that right. The actions of Harrow magistrates court show that something must be done to protect people who exercise their rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Michael Brown, Sir Sidney Chapman, Mr. Nigel Evans, Mr. Michael Fabricant, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Miss Kate Hoey and Mr. Eric Pickles.

Licensing Act 1964 (Amendment)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to remove the power of the relevant court to award costs in respect of a decision by licensing justices to grant a justices' licence, in cases where the unsuccessful objector is a properly constituted residents association: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 140.]

Orders of the Day

Defamation Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

5.13 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a law reform Bill that has a slightly unusual history and derivation. There have been not one but three consultation exercises in England and Wales, and additional consultation in Scotland and Northern Ireland, that led to the Bill being introduced in another place. The House will be aware that it was while it was in the other place that an addition was made that has a special significance for Members of the House. Although that addition appears towards the end of the Bill, I shall—with hon. Members' leave—explain the provision separately, before turning to the more general law reform provisions in the Bill.

Clause 14 would allow an hon. Member or any other person whose conduct in relation to parliamentary proceedings is an issue in an action for defamation to waive protection, such as that given by the Bill of Rights so as to enable evidence to be given and findings to be made in court about his conduct in Parliament. At the same time, the clause preserves the essential protection afforded by the Bill of Rights to Members of both Houses and other persons, such as witnesses before Select Committees, from any legal liability for what they may have said or done during proceedings in Parliament. That is the historic basis of free speech in Parliament, which must be preserved.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: If the hon. and learned Gentleman will allow me, I shall complete this passage. The House will want to know exactly what the Government's position is.

The clause also provides that a waiver by one person will not affect the protection afforded to any other person who does not choose to waive it.

Mr. Carlile: Why do the Government appear to be in favour of granting the right to waiver to an individual Member of Parliament? Why do they not give that right to the Privileges Committee, which could then consider the issue and—if it thinks appropriate and while retaining the privileges of the House—give permission to the individual hon. Member to waive protection?

Mr. Evans: I want to continue with my speech, because it would be helpful if I outlined the Government's position in relation to the clause.

The matter has arisen following the libel case brought by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) against *The Guardian*. The case was stayed on the grounds that it could not be tried properly without hearing evidence about my hon. Friend's conduct in Parliament—the subject of the allegations against him—and that evidence could not be heard because of the prohibition in

[Mr. Evans]

the Bill of Rights on the questioning or impeaching by the courts of proceedings in Parliament. At about the same time, an action brought by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) was similarly stayed.

If this clause were enacted, any hon. Member who wished to would be able to waive his or her protection for the purposes of the defamation proceedings. The defendants would be able to call evidence to justify their published allegations and the issue between them and the hon. Member could be tried by the court.

This is a Government Bill, but not a Government clause. It was introduced for debate by one of the Law Lords, Lord Hoffmann. The Government recognise that the problem raised by my hon. Friends' cases is a real one, but as far as the solution proposed by the clause is concerned, the Government are neutral. We regard this as a matter for Parliament, rather than the Government, to decide, since it raises important questions touching on the Bill of Rights and the privileges of the House.

The concern of Ministers is that this issue should be properly ventilated in debate. I hope that hon. Members will find an opportunity to study the proceedings on Third Reading in another place, when the case for and against the clause was fully argued. I look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members as the Bill proceeds through its later stages.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As this is an extremely important matter and as there is a variety of business before the House today, is it my hon. Friend's intention that the matter should form the subject of a special debate on Report on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Evans: I anticipate that the clause will be dealt with at that point.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): The Minister said, properly, that the Government are neutral, and that was the view of the Lord Chancellor in another place. What would be the attitude of the Government to a proposal that the matter should go to a Select Committee of both Houses?

Mr. Evans: The issue was the subject of a full debate in another place. I have studied the debate, and I was present for a part of it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that there was a full debate in the other place, during which clear arguments for both sides were made. In those circumstances, the means of disposing of the matter that I outlined to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) would seem to be the appropriate way of proceeding.

I turn now to the other provisions of the Bill. I hope that all hon. Members received copies of the draft Bill.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I do not want to detain the House on Second Reading, but I want to get this point absolutely clear. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that whatever view one takes, this issue goes right to the heart of the privilege of Members of Parliament. It is terribly important that the debate on the matter is not time-constrained. I do not wish to detain the House by making a five-minute speech today—I am sure that other hon. Members feel the same way—but I hope that the usual channels can guarantee time for a full debate on this issue on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Evans: I shall take into account my hon. Friend's observations, but that is a matter for the usual channels to resolve. I am sure that his views will be taken into consideration.

On the other provisions, I hope that all hon. Members received copies of the draft Bill, which were sent to them during our consultation exercise last summer.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting, but this matter arises from what was just said about an extremely important issue—one about which many of us are greatly concerned. Is it correct that no Minister can guarantee a debate on any particular issue on Report as that is a matter for Madam Speaker? As we go through what is bound to be a short debate because we are time-constrained, perhaps the Minister or the Leader of the House can help us to understand how we can be guaranteed a debate on the Floor of the House on a matter that goes to the root of parliamentary accountability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The more points of order there are, the longer we will take to debate the issue. The Chair has ears, as well as the usual channels.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The consultation exercise undertaken last summer was a relatively new pattern of consultation, in which we published a complete draft Bill, with brief explanatory notes, inviting views on the detailed drafting, structure and presentation of legislation to implement important reforms to defamation law and procedure, which the Government had already announced. That consultation proved immensely valuable and we were able to make a number of useful modifications and improvements when preparing the Bill for introduction.

Full notes on clauses are available for any hon. Members who wants to examine the provisions in greater detail. Fuller explanations of the current law and the need for reform may be found in the published consultation documents. The Bill brings together defamation reform proposals from several separate sources. A substantial part of the Bill implements recommendations made by the working group set up under the chairmanship of Lord Justice Neill, in response to the Lord Chancellor's invitation to the Supreme Court procedure committee to examine the rules and practice for pleadings in defamation cases and to propose reforms.

We published the working group's report on "Practice and Procedure in Defamation" for consultation in July 1991. We are indebted to Lord Justice Neill and his colleagues for all the work and assistance that they have given us, not only in identifying the problems and proposing solutions in their report, but during the process of working the proposals up into a legislative form for implementation. Lord Hoffmann also played a major role at the very earliest stage, as he suggested to the Lord Chancellor that a special regime should be set up for the summary hearing of defamation claims. That is to be found in clauses 8 to 11 of the Bill. I should like to express my gratitude for those valuable contributions and I am sure that hon. Members would wish to join me in doing so.

The other reform proposal—in clause 1 of the Bill—is the result of the Lord Chancellor's consultation paper, "The Defence of Innocent Dissemination", which was published in July 1990. While the Lord Chancellor's review of defamation law began as a review of the law in England and Wales, many of the changes introduced by the Bill will apply in Scotland as well, as although there are some differences in both the substantive law and the procedures, the systems are broadly similar. The reforms will also apply to Northern Ireland.

I propose to explain the Bill's provisions in fairly broad terms. Clause 1 contains a new statutory defence, which will supersede the common law defence of innocent dissemination. That defence has always been subject to some uncertainty, particularly as to who could rely on it, and those uncertainties have inevitably increased as modern technology has provided us with entirely new concepts in communication.

The statutory defence concentrates on the concept of responsibility for publication. It will not be available to authors, editors or publishers—in the commercial sense—of defamatory material, but it will be available to others whose work may in some way have contributed to the publication of defamatory material that someone else has chosen to publish, unless they knowingly took part in producing a defamatory publication, or had reason to believe that they were doing so.

Clauses 2 to 4 also provide a new defence to replace an existing defence that does not fulfil the purpose for which it was created. There is already a statutory defence of unintentional defamation, which is available when amends have been promptly offered, but it is cumbersome and has been little used. Lord Justice Neill's working group recommended that it should be replaced by a new defence, which would be more streamlined and would be available only to a defendant who was willing to pay compensation assessed by a judge as well as publishing an appropriate correction and apology.

That is the foundation of clauses 2 to 4, which have been substantially modified since we published the draft Bill for consultation last year. That has been done to provide a replacement for section 4 of the Defamation Act 1952, which will enable a large number of cases to be resolved quickly and cheaply—and, it is hoped, amicably—instead of developing into full-scale litigation.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Can the Minister clarify whether he sees clauses 2 to 4 as an alternative way of dealing with inaccurate reports about an individual in newspapers, if the paper offers to correct the statement that has been made, rather than going for a full libel case?

Mr. Evans: I anticipate that that may be the case in appropriate circumstances, but if the hon. Gentleman examines clause 4(3), he will find that there are circumstances in which that defence would not be available. That is particularly so when the offer is made in circumstances in which, at the time that the statement was complained of, it was "false and defamatory" of a party, or

"referred to the aggrieved party or was likely to be understood as referring to him".

Clause 4(3) limits the operation of clauses 2 to 4 and so it does not have the more general application to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is certainly a useful addition to the Bill. The more general application can be found in clauses 8 to 11, which I will deal with later.

We have introduced the concept of a "qualified" offer, which allows the offerer to specify the defamatory meaning that he accepts that his statement conveyed, so that he will not find himself committed to making amends in respect of some wholly different and more defamatory meaning, the possibility of which he may not even have contemplated when making the offer.

Clauses 5 and 6 reduce the limitation period, both in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, in actions for libel or slander and for malicious falsehood. One year is the time within which most actions are begun; they need to be, if the proceedings are to minimise damage to the plaintiff's reputation. The court will have a discretion to disapply the strict limitation period in favour of a plaintiff who had a good reason not to proceed within it. In exercising that discretion, the court will balance the prejudice that the defendant would suffer if it did proceed against the prejudice that the plaintiff would suffer if it did not.

Clause 7 is part of a minor reform, designed to eradicate delaying tactics by parties going through the unnecessary extra stage of applying for rulings as to meanings that statements are "arguably" capable of bearing.

As I told the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), clauses 8 to 11 bring defamation proceedings into line with most other civil proceedings in providing powers of summary disposal. The clauses introduce a new fast-track procedure, which will provide a prompt and inexpensive remedy in less serious defamation cases.

Those clauses give judges new powers, enabling them to consider the strength of the claim and the defences raised and to dispose of the claim summarily in favour of either party.The summary relief that the judge will have power to grant includes damages up to £10,000, a declaration that the statement was false and defamatory and an order requiring the defendant to publish a correction and apology, which may take the form of an approved summary of the judgment.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a little progress as the debate is fairly time-constrained.

Clauses 8 to 11 also provide a substructure for the special rules that will be needed in the context of summary disposal.

Mr. Ashton: I am not a lawyer so the Minister may be able to correct me, but what is to deter a newspaper from running up costs of much more than £10,000 so that the complainant has to settle at an early stage or drop the case? The cost factor is the deterrent.

Mr. Evans: It is and one reason why the fast-track procedure should be supported is that it presents an alternative to one party—the monied party—dragging out proceedings and increasing the level of costs, thus depriving people of their legitimate rights. It was suggested in another place that £10,000 was inadequate and that it should, perhaps, be £20,000 or something of that nature.

[Mr. Evans]

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor agreed to examine any specific proposals for a more appropriate sum and what the arguments might be. He has an open mind on that. To date, no such representations have been made although the issue has been raised in debate. I give the same assurance that we would be prepared to examine arguments for a different figure.

Clause 12 changes the rule that in an action for libel or slander in which the question whether a person committed a criminal offence is relevant to an issue arising in the action, proof of his conviction is conclusive evidence that he committed the offence. Plaintiffs in defamation proceedings will no longer enjoy the artificial advantage of the rightness of someone else's conviction being unchallengeable.

Clause 13 prevents the plaintiff from recovering damages for injury to his reputation beyond those to which he would be entitled if everything likely to affect his reputation were public knowledge. The defendant will now be allowed to lead on and to rely on evidence of conduct which, if known, would affect the plaintiff's reputation. The clause is designed to prevent injustice. It is clearly wrong, for reasons explained with great expertise in the report of Lord Justice Neill's working group, that the court should be forced to assume—and sometimes appear to provide a confirmatory reference—in assessing compensation for damage to a reputation, that a wholly unblemished reputation is deserved, even where there may be available evidence to demonstrate the contrary. That cannot be right. There is, of course, a need to restrict the evidence on which the defendant is able to rely in mitigation to evidence that is relevant to that aspect of the plaintiff's reputation—for instance, his business probity or conduct towards his family—to which the defamatory statement relates.

Clauses 15 and 16, with schedule 1, bring up to date existing statutory privileges. The new privilege under clause 16 for certain reports of legislative, judicial and other public proceedings will apply to publications in general, not only to newspapers and periodicals, and will extend to a wider category of reports—in particular, recognising the need to give reports of proceedings of European institutions protection equivalent to that already given to those in this country. Clauses 17 to 21 contain general supplementary provisions.

The Bill is a useful measure of law reform and has been the subject of widespread consultation. It simplifies a complex area of law and procedure and fits well with current developments in the conduct of civil litigation generally. I commend it to the House.

5.31 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The law of libel is a complex and sometimes arcane area in which often only the wealthy, the brave or the foolhardy dare to tread. Looking around the Chamber, I fancy that we shall hear from some hon. Members who have had experience in one or more of those categories. The law of libel presents the nation with an arena for theatre as much as anything else, but it has ramifications for our national life that go beyond the chuckles, snide remarks and sneers that too often accompany libel actions, and that themselves reflect the harm and sense of hurt involved in such actions.

The law of libel seeks to reconcile the conflicting concerns of the right to know, the right to privacy and the right to free expression. It is not easy to balance those rights in a free society. It is a pity that the Bill, broadly welcome though it is, is not part of a wider package that would enable us to address concerns about freedom of information as well as those raised in the past by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) about a right to reply.

The Bill continues to leave on the shelf the issue of how we can make it possible for people of little or no means to defend their reputations. One of the less satisfactory elements of our law is the fact that the reputations of most ordinary people count for little as far as the law is concerned because they will never have the means with which to defend them. That is one of the great pities of our system of civil justice, but sometimes it can be one of the great scandals. We cannot address that problem at present through the legal aid fund and I do not suggest that that would be an appropriate way of addressing it.

The Bill attempts to establish a new fast-track summary procedure, which is welcome as far as it goes. For most people, even that will be inaccessible because they will not be able to afford the large lawyers' fees that inevitably follow such actions. There is probably no more lucrative area of practice. It is not a field, in my 20 years as a solicitor and a barrister, in which I have had the opportunity to graze but there are some hon. and learned Conservative Members with much experience in it. They will no doubt share with the House the problems of ordinary people of limited means—in so far as they are aware of them—in gaining access to the law of libel. The Bill does nothing to address the concerns of such people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) mentioned some of those concerns when he noted that the cost of going to law was a deterrent for most people. The Bill will address that issue—I welcome this—in several ways; for example, by introducing a power for judges that will enable them to dispose through a summary procedure and to grant damages of up to £10,000. It is to be hoped that that will focus the minds of the parties concerned and reduce costs. There is a question mark over that, which we shall no doubt want to explore in Committee. There is a danger that the summary procedure will become yet another procedural staging post and not necessarily provide the relief that it was intended to provide. It is important to ensure that that is not allowed to happen as the rules of practice and precedent develop.

The Bill is welcome to that extent. It is also welcome—although it may not go far enough—in its attempt to meet the challenges presented in the law of libel by developing technology. Internet communications open up a new area of potential libel. They open up new vistas of opportunity for those who pay no heed to the reputations of others, and who will seek the anonymity of technology to disseminate defamatory material.

The Bill considers the responsibilities of operators of Internet communications. It seeks to protect them against liability for defamation resulting from innocent dissemination of material. That is all well and good, as far as it goes. The Bill does not help, however, in that it does not say how the Internet is effectively to be policed to tackle the dissemination of defamatory material. It does not say how defamatory material, once identified, might easily and without undue cost be removed.

I look at the Minister, and envisage him surfing the Internet. These days, more and more of us, in our little offices, have an opportunity to surf the Internet—indeed, it is the only opportunity for surfing that we get, and we do not even have to adopt a specific mode of dress for that experience. Policing the Internet and ensuring that defamatory material is removed remain significant problems. Some time, it will be necessary for the House to legislate more comprehensively on that than it has done.

We shall wish to explore several aspects of the Bill in more detail in Committee. We are worried about the implications of reducing the limitation periods for actions for libel, slander and malicious falsehood from three years to one. That is a significant problem. Let us take an example. It may be difficult for a police officer who seeks to address defamation as it may affect him in the course of his duties, to bring an action within one year. Before the way is clear to take an action, he is likely to have to undergo the police complaints procedure and the internal disciplinary procedure. What is to happen to him?

What is to happen to people who are obliged to spend a considerable amount of time getting together the money to launch an action? That is related to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw. Some people need to obtain the money from a friend or through a public appeal. Have the Government sufficiently taken that into account in reducing the period as they do? Opposition Members have doubts about that.

It is not clear why in one jurisdiction—Scotland—it should be possible to bring an action within three years yet in another—England and Wales—the time should be restricted to one. I do not suggest for a moment that in Scotland the limitation period should be reduced from three years to one, because I know that the Law Society of Scotland strongly opposes that. Its members have good reason for opposing it, as have Opposition Members.

We shall ask some questions about another aspect of the Bill, which the Minister mentioned—the issue of how far it is proper to go into the background of a plaintiff in libel proceedings for the purposes of defending the claim and mitigating the damages, known as "the rule in Scott *v.* Sampson". Others may have different views on this, and I look forward to hearing the contributions of hon. and learned Members on that subject, but concern has been expressed by practitioners that the Bill might be a muckraker's charter. It would benefit certain newspaper defendants to undertake an in-depth investigation into the plaintiff's private life in an endeavour to unearth something to his discredit that they can then expose in open court as a way of diminishing the plaintiff—

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): And frightening them off.

Mr. Boateng:—or, as the hon. Lady says, frightening them off. That is an important point, which we wish to explore in Committee.

I shall now discuss an aspect that turns an otherwise relatively uncontroversial and broadly welcome Bill into something that rightly provokes controversy and concern—the introduction, almost by a side-wind, on Third Reading in the other place, by Lord Justice Hoffmann of an amendment that goes to the heart of the privileges of the House.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I may be mistaken, but it was not introduced on Third Reading in the Lords; it was introduced in Committee. It was debated at that stage. It was then debated again on Report and, on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor, a decision was postponed until Third Reading to give even more peers who wished to participate in the debate full notice and thereby to give the maximum opportunity for Members of the other House to debate the issue thoroughly—which they did.

Mr. Boateng: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and of course he does have a real interest in the clause—

Mr. John Morris: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to raise this, but would it not have been better, indeed proper, for the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) to have declared his interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members know that it is not for the Chair to determine which hon. Members should raise which interests. That rests entirely with hon. Members, and they must live with their decisions.

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend because the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) does have an interest, and he will of course want the House to know that. I understand his interests, and I mean him no disrespect by pointing that out, save to—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I right in believing that if an issue affects all Members of the House equally, all of us have an interest that is not registrable?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That seems painfully obvious.

Mr. Boateng: "Painfully" is perhaps the operative word. The intervention by the hon. Member for Tatton reflects his real interest in this subject. The turnout for the debate on Third Reading in the other place made it quite clear that the hon. Gentleman's interest has excited the interest of others. Some of those who took part do not usually get so interested in innocuous law reform measures.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Would it not be more correct to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) has a predicament, not an interest in the sense that we usually use the word in this Chamber? I make no comment one way or the other on that predicament.

Mr. Boateng: As usual, the hon. Gentleman puts his finger on the point. It was precisely the hon. Gentleman's predicament that led to this provision. Having latched on to that helpful word, let us further explore the hon. Gentleman's predicament and whether the predicament of one hon. Member is a proper reason to revisit such a fundamental element of our constitution.

Parliamentary privilege and any amendment to article 9 of the Bill of Rights are far too important matters to be changed for the sake of one hon. Gentleman's predicament. The issue should of course be examined with the utmost care and debated in depth, but I am worried about the Government's proposal for dealing with the issue.

[Mr. Boateng]

A debate on Report is always time-limited. Right hon. and hon. Members may want to debate other matters on Report. It seems to us important to learn the views and listen to the wisdom of others on the subject—

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I declare the same predicament as the one already mentioned by the Minister. This is not just a question of the predicament of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). If any Member of the House brings an action for defamation against a newspaper, he will discover that the newspapers have found a useful loophole under article 9 of the Bill of Rights. As a result, 652 people have been disadvantaged in a way that has nothing to do with what is said in the House or with our proceedings. By dint of the fact that they are Members of the House, they have been disadvantaged vis-à-vis all the other citizens in the country. The attempt here is to close the loophole in question.

Mr. Boateng: I repeat to the hon. Gentleman what I think Mr. Justice Owen told him: he must take the good with the ill. Hon. Members enjoy great privileges and there is a price to be paid for them. Those privileges are not ours; they belong to the House. First and foremost they are for the benefit of our constituents, not us. We must therefore think very carefully before we do anything to undermine them.

Parliamentary privilege has stood the test of time these 300 years. This is the first time in 300 years that the predicament has arisen in quite that way. We would be most unwise to discard the protection that the House has been afforded for 300 years merely because of the predicament of one, two or even three Members of this House—

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Even me.

Mr. Boateng: We all recognise that the privileges attached to membership of the House are attached to us all. To that extent, the plight of one may be the plight of all. We must also recognise our overriding responsibility to those who send us here and who, through the ballot box, confer on us and on the House the privileges of speech that enable us to fulfil our role in this place.

The point was put succinctly in a report of the Privileges Committee when it examined the position of the late and right hon. Member for Streatham in the early days of the second world war. He was threatened with prosecution under the Official Secrets Act 1911 simply for asking a question about the state of London's anti-aircraft defences. The Committee's report, afterwards endorsed by this House, stated:

> "The privilege of freedom of speech enjoyed by Members of Parliament is in truth the privilege of their constituents. It is secured to Members not for their personal benefit but to enable them to discharge the functions of their office without fear of prosecution, civil or criminal."

That, surely, is the point.

We must not alter the basis of privilege without careful investigation. That is why Labour proposes that, following Second Reading, the Bill be committed to a Committee of both Houses so that it may be properly examined and so that the constitutional issues that clause 14 throws up can be properly explored.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is not the weakness of that suggestion to be found in the fact that, if that sort of debate took place, it would preclude the full and proper debate on the Floor of the House which is essential—there having been a similar debate in another place?

Mr. Boateng: We have been advised that a Joint Committee of both Houses, having taken evidence and debated the matter, would report back to both Houses and that a full debate, informed by the evidence taken and any conclusions reached, might then take place.

That is the attraction of the Opposition's proposal. We make it because we are all too conscious of what the implications would be were clause 14 to pass into law. We are concerned about the overthrow of a long-established protection of parliamentary privilege and of right hon. and hon. Members provided by article 9 of the Bill of Rights and about the erosion of that cherished constitutional principle.

We are also concerned about a possible arbitrariness. A potential litigant would not know if, when and to what extent a Member of Parliament involved in litigation would waive parliamentary privilege. That, in turn, could lead to uncertainty in the law and unfairness. *[Interruption.]* One bears in mind the predicament of the hon. Member for Tatton, who no doubt will make his own speech in due course. However, such matters are not best debated by way of sedentary muttering.

We have to consider whether the House can view with any equanimity the proposal that the definition of the term "proceedings" should be the subject of judicial interpretation. I see a puzzled expression on the face of the hon. Member for Tatton. Perhaps he should consider the implications of clause 14.

I hesitate to go into too great detail, bearing in mind that we are debating the Bill on Second Reading, but we have to consider what a judge will be asked to do. A judge will be asked to consider whether a particular aspect of the work of the House falls within the definition of "proceedings". That must involve a degree of scrutiny and interpretation by the judiciary of the rights, privileges and functions of the House and that raises serious concerns, not least at a time of increasing judicial intervention. We want those matters to be explored in detail.

The Minister has explained to us that the matter can be explored on the Floor of the House on Report. That is all well and good as far as the House is concerned, but what about the views of the various Commonwealth Parliaments that also rely on the Bill of Rights and that look to article 9 for protection? How are they to be consulted? Have they been consulted? Perhaps they ought to be consulted. After all, the Prebble *v.* Television New Zealand case and the Privy Counsel ruling therein, which is at the heart of the predicament of the hon. Member for Tatton, arose from a case in a Commonwealth jurisdiction. We should also consider the other Commonwealth jurisdictions. Any change in United Kingdom privilege law is likely to have reverberations across the Commonwealth, the directness of the impact varying according to local constitutional arrangements.

The Bill raises all those concerns that touch the rights and privileges of each and every hon. Member, not least those who may not choose to lift the veil when another

does in the course of proceedings—a problem recognised by Lord Hoffmann when he moved clause 14 on Third Reading in the other place.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Has the hon. Gentleman observed that Lord Hoffmann called for a vote on the clause, but did not vote for it?

Mr. Boateng: That may be a matter of some significance. When one reflects on the high regard in which the noble and learned Lord is held by members of our profession and his wisdom and knowledge of the law, the fact that he did not vote may well tell us something. There is all the more reason for us to take great care before proceeding down the route that clause 14 suggests.

The Minister said that it is not a Government measure, but one contained within a Government Bill. That would have carried a little more conviction had the Lord Chancellor not expressed himself in such clear and unambiguous terms in support of clause 14; nevertheless one hears what the Minister says. It is all the more reason for the Government to make time for the issue to be considered in a Joint Committee—rather than having it dealt with on Report without sufficient time being guaranteed—and to give the motion a fair wind.

The Bill is significant and important. We broadly welcome its main thrust, but one aspect causes the Opposition great concern. We shall return to it repeatedly to make sure that the privileges of the House and its Members—which are not ours, but are held in trust for our constituents—are properly represented.

6.7 pm

Mr. David Ashby (North–West Leicestershire): I was rather disappointed, but not surprised, to hear an establishment speech from the Minister when we have the opportunity of a radical change in the defamation law. I was surprised, however, to hear an establishment speech from the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), and I expect one in due course from the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). They are all part of the establishment. I am not.

I have no interest to declare except my experience of one of the more deleterious libel cases. I had the temerity to challenge a national newspaper. I was in a fairly unique position. As a lawyer at the criminal Bar, I had no experience of civil proceedings, and I came to the libel action as an informed layman, and no more than that. I hope that my experience will help the House.

The fact of being defamed was undoubtedly the worst experience of my life, although some say that birth is pretty traumatic. The effect of the article and the newspaper coverage left me with a physical shock that was not dissimilar to that of a serious road accident. Sleep left me, and I found myself bursting into tears for no reason. I suffered acute depression, severe ill health, and mental and physical exhaustion. Many other aspects of my personal and private life have been affected and are well documented by the press, who never leave me alone.

I have no doubt that the libel laws need urgent and radical reform. Let us put the matter in context. For years, hon. Members and the public have been amazed by the antics of the press. Parliament has wrung its hands in anguish, but it has lacked the courage to deal with the problem. Press commissions, press complaints commissions, inquiries such as Calcutt, and drinks in the last chance saloon with Ministers have ended in admissions from one and all that they are too frightened to do anything.

Basically, the problems relate to press standards. Newspaper standards are at a very low ebb. Journalists and editors appear to lack professional integrity, while at the same time the newspaper industry is being concentrated in the hands of a few. The battle is on, with a ruthless, no-holds-barred circulation war, breaches of privacy and salacious intrusions into private lives. Every ethical standard has been sacrificed to the bigger headline that will sell more newspapers.

Newspapers assume a ruthless arrogance: claiming the right to know and holding themselves up as defenders of the public, when they simply want more information so that they can print more lurid stories and sell more copies. The first point that the House must understand is that newspapers do not exist to serve some public good: they exist to make a profit—and sensational and libellous stories make money for the newspaper proprietors. The libel laws must address that point: libel victims and the courts have a right to know how much money the newspapers are making from their libellous activities.

Secondly, the libel laws are the only way of controlling what the press print and, ultimately, press quality. I cannot over-emphasise that point, and I draw it to the attention of all those who think that the Bill is unimportant.

We all want to see a responsible and a courageous press which provides news and comment about important and relevant matters. We do not want to know about Elton John's fictitious diet or about an actor's behaviour 40 years ago. The editor has responsibility and control over a newspaper's contents—whether the stories are written by journalists or by freelance reporters. If we are to improve the quality of our newspapers, we must enshrine that point firmly in our defamation law.

Some people may be surprised to learn that that responsibility is not spelled out in law. The editors must have a vicarious liability for all that is printed in their newspapers—they must be held accountable. Furthermore, if a newspaper wishes to defame, the editor should give evidence in court to explain why he thought it was right to allow that defamation. Editors allow defamation freely because they seldom have to explain themselves: they hide behind a right to silence, while people's reputations are destroyed. When an editor is not called to explain himself, it should be presumed, first, that the article is libellous; and, secondly, that there is no defence for the libel.

In my case, Times Newspapers Ltd. sheltered behind the fact that The *Sunday Times* editor, Andrew Neill, was sunning himself in Bermuda and did not know about the lying story that was written. The effect was disastrous for me, because I could not put before the jury the sheer malice that was displayed by *The Sunday Times*. If editors were held accountable for newspaper content, press behaviour would improve at one stroke. Editors would question journalists about their actions and their sources, because they might have to go into the witness box and explain an article. At one stroke, editors would become more responsible.

The Bill arises from the Neill report. My overwhelming impression of the libel courts in the High Court of Justice is that they are there to look after the newspapers.

[Mr. David Ashby]

The newspapers can do little wrong. At every interlocutory point, the newspapers are granted extensions of time, orders to give further information, and opportunities to waste the poor victims' time and money. Newspapers have the time and the money on their side, and they know how to use it to their advantage. Even in the Court of Appeal, the judges back the wealthy newspapers that have seriously libelled a victim, and invariably reduce damages. I shall return to the question of wealthy newspapers and damages in a moment.

Therefore, it is no surprise that, when a judge heads a committee on defamation, he totally ignores the victims—as the Neill committee did—and takes evidence only from the newspapers. Solicitors who represent victims of libel—they did not even know of the committee's existence—and the victims were ignored. The only people asked to submit evidence were the gang of in-house solicitors who represent the newspapers. What a committee report.

The result is a report that is a newspapers' charter, and a Defamation Bill that will have journalists laughing with glee in the public houses of Fleet street. At every turn, the Bill makes it harder for the victim and easier for newspapers to defame. God knows it is hard enough for the poor sod whose life is ruined.

I return to the question of newspaper wealth. A libel action is a serious and an expensive business for the victim—I use the word "victim" every time—which can ruin him financially. Newspapers often employ the tactic of prolonging the case and increasing the costs, so that the victim runs out of money.

Newspapers indulge in defamation only to make money. They make vast sums out of the reports of proceedings, and I believe that they should pay for that indulgence. For a few months, I read every part of every national and regional newspaper, and I can report that the press are ruining many lives up and down the country. The victims have no redress, because they cannot afford to sue.

We must do something about that problem. I believe that a new legal aid fund, financed by a levy on the newspapers, should be established specifically to deal with defamation. If the newspapers want to defame, they should finance the consequences. They are getting away with it at the moment, and they must not continue to do so.

It is not a level playing field, for two reasons. First, newspapers can offset the damages and the costs against their vast profits, but the victims cannot. That must be stopped. Secondly, juries understand the severity of the effects of libel on the victim better than appeal judges. The only language that the newspapers understand is money. Juries should be free to assess the damages. Those damages should remain, and should be changed by the Court of Appeal only in the most exceptional circumstances. That would make newspapers better and more responsible—although they would squeal about it.

The third major change required is to the defences open to newspapers. Clause 13 is quite outrageous: it allows newspapers to write a completely fictitious story and then dredge through a victim's life from beginning to end, throwing as much mud as possible in the hope that it will stick and justify their defamation. The House rejected that measure in the past as unfair, unjust and unworthy. Only a libel judge would think of resurrecting it for the benefit of the press.

In my case, the press ruthlessly resorted to every dirty trick in the book to justify the story. I suffered burglary, theft, impersonation and computer hacking. No bank accounts are safe—Mr. Leppard of *The Sunday Times* boasts that he hacks into every one of our accounts. He does it freely. In my case, there was a note from an editor saying, "Please do not spend too much on hacking into the accounts" to find out how much we owned and how much we earned. That is what they do. I believe that that conduct is not right, that it should not be allowed, and that any evidence obtained in such a manner should not be allowed to be used in any court.

It is simply no good complaining. In my case, the trial judge said that I could take my complaints to the Press Complaints Commission. This was a full-blooded defamation action, and I was the victim. The PCC is a toothless watchdog.

Being defamed is not a game, as the courts, lawyers and newspapers seem to think it is. What is at stake is a person's integrity and reputation. It is absolutely incredible that, if I were in a criminal court, allegations would have to be proved to a standard so that the jury was sure, whereas, in a libel action, I can be absolutely destroyed—as I have been—on the balance of probabilities.

The standard of proof must be changed, and there should be no justification for printing a pack of lies. The burden of proving justification should always lie on the person making the allegations, and the victim should never have to reply to that allegation if he does not wish to.

I have raised points to which we should be addressing ourselves if we are to try to get the law of defamation right. Let us consider the Bill. Clause 1 provides for responsibility for publication. I cannot understand why it is unreasonable that those who broadcast, invariably for commercial gain, should not take responsibility for what is broadcast, because the victim will otherwise be left without any effective redress.

Clauses 2 to 4 deal with making amends. They are a means by which publishers without a leg to stand on can avoid damages being assessed by a jury. As the law currently stands, a publisher can make a qualified offer of amends in respect of one or more defamatory meanings. So, under this section, a publisher can offer to apologise, make a correction and pay damages in relation to one allegation, but seek to justify the rest of the article. The victim, who may reject the offer, may end up losing even the damages to which he was entitled. In this respect, the present law is good enough.

We have already dealt with the limitation period. Why should defamation laws be unique in having a one-year limitation period? Why should it not be three years? It was recently decreased from six years to three years. Why should we not have a three-year limitation period, as in other proceedings?

The summary disposal of a claim simply adds to the victim's burden. The only effect of this section is to create a ceiling of £10,000 for the victim. That is the only effect, because, if the victim wishes to go down the road of summary disposal and the judge finds that there is a realistic prospect of success—as the judge invariably does—for the newspapers, which have masses of money

to spend on the most expensive counsel, the poor victim has wasted money, and has to bear the costs of the claim's summary disposal. There is already a swift method, and we should continue with it.

The provision on evidence of convictions worries me, because it could bring the law into disrepute. Obviously investigative journalists want to be able to argue that a conviction was wrong when a libel action is brought by, for example, police officers. So they seek to prove something according to one standard of proof in a jurisdiction in which there is another standard of proof. That brings the law into disrepute.

My speech has had to be somewhat hurried, but I have set out my misgivings about the Bill—in which Lord Justice Neill has clearly been over-impressed by the newspapers' house lawyers. No attempt has been made in the Bill to strike a balance between victims of defamatory articles and publishers. I know that publishers will either squeal about freedom of the press or ignore this speech, in the hope that the less the public know about it the better. I heard squeals earlier from the Press Gallery.

My suggestions are not about taking away press freedoms but about reducing newspapers' arrogant right—as they see it—to defame freely. My suggestions focus responsibility on editors, making them do the job properly and responsibly. My suggestions would improve integrity in journalism and in the newspapers.

Finally, my suggestions would restore a long-lost balance for the victims, who are often in humble circumstances—I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Brent, South on that point—who seem to have been forgotten by the House, and who are frequently sneered at by the newspapers. The House owes a duty to them.

6.24 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I should like to express concern, as other hon. Members have done, that the House is being asked—with minimum publicity and certainly none of the widespread consultation that the Minister was boasting about—to amend the Bill of Rights 1688, which is one of the cornerstones of our liberties. We have been told that this House was exclusively concerned with the defence of our liberties in that year, but that privilege is now, of course, enjoyed by another place.

An amendment was passed in another place—after a very short debate in Committee, and another, longer debate on Third Reading—to amend article 9. As the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) told us, Lord Hoffmann, the proposer, commended the amendment, but curiously did not vote for it. The Lord Chancellor was neutral on it.

I shall not relate article 9 at length because of the need to save time, but it is also our safeguard and our shield. The current problem has arisen because of the difficulty in that the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) wants to go to the courts to clear his name. In so doing, he issued proceedings for libel, and *The Guardian* pleaded justification. As I understand it, for the court to investigate the issue would have involved an investigation of what the hon. Gentleman had done in the course of his parliamentary duties. The court held that that was contrary to article 9, and the action was stayed.

Article 9 is the guarantee of our freedom of speech, and it protects us from actions against us for libel for whatever we say in Parliament. It is our shield, and it has been our shield for centuries. The actions of the hon. Member for Tatton would have involved throwing away the shield and using our proceedings as a spear—they would certainly have had to be used as a spear—in the course of those proceedings.

I say immediately and sincerely that I have sympathy with the hon. Member for Tatton in his efforts to clear his name. Strangely, there has never been a case in English history in which an hon. Member has sought to bring a libel action that raised the question of his parliamentary conduct.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) has already referred us to the well-known case of R. *v.* Pebble, a decision of the Judicial Committee. The court then decided that it could not inquire into parliamentary conduct, and that, if the effect was to stifle a defence—in that case it was a television company's—that defamatory allegations were true, the hon. Member's actions would be stayed. As I understand it, that was the position as regards the hon. Member for Tatton.

As I have said, I have the greatest sympathy for the hon. Member, and I certainly would not lend my name to allowing a ministerial career to be wrecked, at least temporarily, because he is denied access to the courts to attempt to clear his name. I am concerned about what is the right way in which to accomplish such access. In my view, an amendment that was passed at Third Reading in another place, without any previous consideration or consultation, is not the way in which to do it.

We are overturning with a simple amendment 300 years of history in which the system apparently worked. The old adage,

"hard cases make bad law",

has more than a grain of truth in it. Lord Simon of Glaisdale, a distinguished former Law Lord, whom some of us—few, perhaps, by now—remember fondly as a particularly able and helpful Solicitor-General in a Conservative Government, advised caution on it in another place. He believed that this was a question of the highest constitutional importance. He wanted the whole matter to go before a Select Committee of both Houses. I am respectfully supportive: Lord Simon has much greater knowledge than me. I consider it strongly desirable for the issues raised in the amendment to be considered in such a way.

In the past few days, I have consulted one of the most eminent of our constitutional lawyers, Professor Sir William Wade in Cambridge, who has advised Governments all over the world—and individuals—on constitutional law. While he is relaxed on the issue of actually amending the Bill of Rights, he recommends further study before any change is made. That is good counsel, from someone who sincerely believes that justice should be done.

Why should the matter be studied further? First, it is not the privilege of an hon. Member—or any other Member—that we are discussing; it is the privilege of Parliament—the privilege of this House. I would be happier if an amendment had been carried allowing the House, when it was thought right, to waive that privilege in a fit and proper case. Secondly, speech after speech in the debate in the other place pointed out the unfairness of Members' not being able to clear their names, while ignoring the fact that that is precisely the position of the man in the street who is attacked by a Member during a debate in the House.

[Mr. John Morris]

That curious state of affairs was ignored by advocates of a waiver, who were more than content to bask in the shelter of privilege while continuing to claim a right to disparage those outside without putting themselves in any danger. If a Member is allowed to take up his spear and waive the privilege of the House, may not pressure be exerted in due course for us to lose our shield as well? The public will want to know, and there will be pressure from that source.

There has been considerable interest in the matter in the Commonwealth, and at least one case has been dealt with there. Some may want to follow us, because they also have the advantage of article 9. Should we not hear what they have to say, and take evidence from them?

Thirdly, there is the issue of the definition of proceedings in Parliament. That, too, has been raised in another place. The High Court in the Strand might take one view, and this High Court of Parliament might take another.

Fourthly, what if more than one Member is involved? What if one wants to waive his privilege—or the House's privilege—and the other does not? During the debate in the other place, Lord Hoffmann said that he could not think of an easy answer. "Leave it to the judges": that is what he advised. Judges are used to handling tricky situations.

With respect, I doubt very much that the judiciary who must try such cases would welcome this particular baby if it were put into their lap. Surely, if Parliament wishes to change the position, it should resolve such obvious problems rather than walking away from them.

Lord Simon also asked why the issue should be limited to defamation. What if there were fisticuffs between two Members, or—perhaps more probable—between an investigative journalist and a Member? A reputation can be won or lost in such circumstances. Lord Lester pointed out that a Member who had been defamed would be under pressure to waive our collective privilege so that he could sue.

If the amendment is carried in both Houses, let there be no doubt that cross-examination will have few limits, and could possibly cover the whole of a Member's career and his actions in Parliament, rather than being confined to the narrowness of one incident. If we want to go along that road, we should know what the difficulties are. If the Select Committee agrees to my suggestion, and the suggestion of the Opposition, may I suggest some safeguards to the Committee?

First, the matter should be decided by resolution of the House, because that is the House's privilege—I believe that it can already act in that way—rather than through the waiver of an individual Member. Secondly, a Member should be allowed to refer his case to the new Privileges Committee, to see what the problems are and examine them.

Thirdly, if that Committee agreed—I speak as one who served for many a long year on the Committee of Privileges—it could, if it wished, recommend to the House that the House waive its privilege. That would be a better way of safeguarding a specific situation that had not been considered by the whole Select Committee; we are examining it now, perhaps a little more academically.

There may be other problems. One, raised in the other place, is that the Bill of Rights preceded the Act of Union, and does not, in its present form, apply to Scotland. We should not put our hard-earned right of freedom in the House in jeopardy—the right to speak without fear or favour, knowing that what we say will not be held against us in the courts.

Having read all the debates in the other place and considered the matter as widely as I could, I advise the House that the only proper course is to refer the matter to a Select Committee for further consideration.

6.37 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am grateful to be called, and will be as brief as I can.

First, let me declare an interest—or, perhaps, a predicament—as a practitioner at the libel Bar. Let me also place on record my thanks to the Neill committee, and to Lord Justice Neill and other committee members, for their work. I am afraid that they have not received unstinting praise from some hon. Members this evening; that is a pity, because they deserve it. Irrespective of whether we agree with their conclusions, their work should be recognised and they should not be abused in the House.

I know that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and I shall therefore confine my remarks to as brief a compass as possible. I am aware that other hon. Members who have found themselves in predicaments wish to speak. I accept that the new defence under clause 1 is worth having, and that we should allow it to work its way through the law of defamation to see whether it proves useful—I think that it will—but I should like to refer briefly to some other clauses, explaining why I agree with some and am concerned by others. I do not expect an answer to some—indeed, most—of my questions during the debate, but I should be very pleased to receive a written response to some of them if my hon. Friend the Minister finds that convenient.

Clause 2(5) states:

"An offer to make amends under this section may not be made by a person after serving a defence in defamation proceedings brought against him by the aggrieved party in respect of the publication in question."

I ask, "Why not?" If a defendant, having overreached himself, realises that he should more sensibly come to terms with the plaintiff and he can do so by offering to make amends under clause 2, he should be allowed to do so even if that requires that he withdraw his already-served defence.

Clause 5 deals with limitation and I wish to echo the concerns of the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), which, I believe, are uppermost in the mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason). I suggest that a year is too short unless other safeguards are built in. I note the point made by the hon. Member for Brent, South that those who are involved in police disciplinary proceedings may exceed the year before the proceedings are concluded, but the court can take that factor into account when it exercises its discretion to extend the limitation period. Would not it be more sensible to leave the limitation period at three years rather than allowing an additional discretion to the court?

The same applies—the point may be made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay—to Press Complaints Commission matters. I stand to be corrected, but I

understand that the Press Complaints Commission will not accept complaints if proceedings have already been initiated. If a plaintiff issues proceedings within a few days or weeks of the cause of action arising, he is prohibited from going to the PCC. If the limitation period is to be reduced to a year, the rules of the PCC should be adjusted so that an action can be commenced. The proceedings could be stayed pending the resolution of the PCC hearing. The simple answer is to leave at three years the limitation period for causes of action in libel and slander and others in clause 5(3).

I also note the points that the hon. Member for Brent, South made about poverty. Some litigants will not be able to bring a case immediately because they do not have the funds. Many people are assisted by, for example, the Police Federation, other trade associations and trade unions and they are not inhibited by lack of funds, but others will not have such assistance and they should be given the opportunity to raise the money before bringing proceedings. As I said earlier, the court has a discretion to extend the limitation period, but it is tidier and more sensible to leave the limitation period as it is.

Clause 7 deals with the meaning of a statement and states:

"In defamation proceedings the courts shall not be asked to rule whether a statement is arguably capable, as opposed to capable, of bearing a particular meaning or meanings attributed to it."

I welcome that change to the rules about the joining of issue on what a defamatory statement may or may not mean. At the moment, despite the introduction of order 82, rule 3A, the procedures for defamation are being used as a dead bat and not always as intended, following the case of Keays *v.* Murdoch Magazines (UK) Ltd.

I am worried about some of the philosophy behind the summary disposal aspect of the Bill. The provisions have some good bits and some less good bits and I am concerned about the limit of £10,000 in clause 9(1)(c). I appreciate that that figure can be adjusted—and may be adjusted—upwards, but many litigants do not want an award of what, to a newspaper, is no more than petty cash. They want a public vindication of their reputations. Even when the defendant cannot afford to pay the huge sums awarded as compensation, the fact that a jury or judge has awarded a large sum often acts as a vindication and a message to the world. One has to think only of the case of Lord Aldington, who was awarded £1.5 million. I must confess that I acted for one of the less successful parties in that case. I doubt that Lord Aldington will collect that £1.5 million, but at least the world knows that the jury thought so little of the conduct of the defendants—and possibly at least one of their counsel—that it found it necessary to award £1.5 million to mark its disapproval.

I appreciate that the cases that may come before the courts under the summary disposal procedure will not be the Aldington-Tolstoy type of case—under clause 8(4)(d), cases of serious libel, which are widely published, are not suitable for summary procedure—but the procedure still causes me some difficulties, not least because it gives the court editorial power over newspapers. The court will have the power to order a defendant to publish or cause to be published a suitable correction and apology. It would be better for apologies and corrections to be agreed between the warring parties, rather than ordered by the court. What will be the consequence of disobeying that order? Will there be a contempt procedure or will the court enforce the order in some other unspecified way?

I am also concerned about clause 10, which authorises

"the court at any stage of the proceedings—

(i) to treat any application, pleading or other step in the proceedings as an application for summary disposal".

The intention behind that is that the court should get a grip on proceedings that should not been allowed to live and dispose of defences that have no merit. I applaud the hands-on approach that the courts take these days and that the Bill would inject into this aspect of the law, but we should be careful about allowing the courts to take too interventionist an approach. Proceedings take place between two citizens and, ideally and subject to safeguards, those parties should work out how their cases and defences should be run.

Clause 13 deals with the rule under Scott *v.* Sampson. I am in two minds about the clause, although I do not intend to join the Liberal Democrats on that account. We must be careful that a case that may be about only the meaning of words—and thus, in addition, damages—does not extend into a long debate about matters that are not directly connected to the libel. I do not accept the criticisms made by my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), sincere though they may have been, because some of them were unreal. But there is a danger that a simple trial could be extended unnecessarily or unfairly because a plaintiff must have a right to respond to, and to seek to demonstrate to be untrue, the allegations made against him in mitigation of damages by the defendant. We must be careful not to extend trials unnecessarily.

Clause 14 is the most contentious. I shall not enter a long argument about the merits or demerits of the amendment tabled by Lord Hoffmann in another place, but I ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, and others interested in the subject, to study carefully the report of the Third Reading of the Bill in another place on 7 May at columns 29-33, 33-35 and 38-42 and to read Lord Hoffmann's speech at columns 24-29. There is much to be learnt there and some of it has been repeated by the hon. Member for Brent, South and the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). Others may share their views, but I think that it would be a mistake, despite my great sympathy for my hon. Friends the Members for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and for Torbay.

Mr. Allason: Hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Garnier: Following his success in the law courts on a number of occasions, although not last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay can probably be dubbed "my learned Friend". He certainly claims to be.

I think that it would be unwise to bolt on to a defamation Bill a clause that will fundamentally adjust the relationship of hon. Members with their constituents. After all, we are the guardians of the privileges of Parliament and we should be careful before putting them into the hands of an individual hon. Member.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay was not quite right when he said that unless the clause is part of the Bill no Member of Parliament will be able to bring a libel action. Article 9 of the Bill of Rights comes into play only in cases that will require a court to impeach or question the proceedings, speeches or debates of the House or another place. All I ask is that my hon. Friends bear it in mind that this issue is bigger than their personal problems.

[Mr. Garnier]

I do not say that to belittle their appreciation of their own problems, but the constitutional issues are bigger and should be thought about more carefully before we include clause 14 in the Bill. I suggest that a more sensible means of dealing with it should be found.

Statutory privilege is dealt with in clause 15. It is a welcome updating of the list of proceedings that can be safely reported by non-malicious newspapers. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire does not believe that there is such a creature as a non-malicious newspaper, but I can assure him that there is, even if we do not meet it very often.

I have a problem. Paragraph 12 in part II of the schedule to the Defamation Act 1952 states:

"A copy or fair and accurate report or summary of any notice or other matter issued for the information of the public by or on behalf of any government department, officer of state, local authority or chief officer of police."

That was included in the category of statement that was privileged subject to explanation or contradiction. It seems to be missing from the schedule to this Bill. I wonder whether that is a mistake.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: While my hon. and learned Friend is dealing with qualified privilege, does he think that it would be appropriate, between now and the Committee stage, to look at the judgment referred to this morning in *The Daily Telegraph* where a press conference was held by a judge not to be a public meeting and a newspaper lost an action on those grounds? Should not that be clarified at the same time?

Mr. Garnier: I am sure that if my hon. Friend is lucky enough to be chosen to be a member of the Committee, he will be able to draw that to hon. Members' attention.

Those are my brief comments about this otherwise welcome Bill. It brings up to date certain aspects of the law of defamation and I fear that it may bring me some pleasure a little further down the Strand. That is another matter and the Nolan committee may prevent me from speaking on it in the future. When my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has a few quiet moments, I hope that he will consider the points that I have made, which apart from my comments on clause 14 are not destructive of the passage of the Bill, which, in broad essence, I am happy to welcome.

6.53 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Although I am a practising member of the Bar, I would not claim the expertise of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) in defamation law. I recall once drafting a statement of claim against the Liverpool *Daily Post*, and there ceases my contribution to the annals of defamation law. Sometimes in later life we gain the opportunity to dip our finger into that lucrative field which the hon. and learned Member has enjoyed for many years, although no doubt less so now because of his responsibilities in the House.

Clause 14 has become known as the Hoffmann amendment. The hon. Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) took good and ample advantage during his speech of his parliamentary privilege—well, not of his parliamentary privilege, but his right to use the privilege of the House. The confusion in the way in which I just expressed that depicts the misunderstanding of the dilemma facing many hon. Members.

The privilege is not the privilege of an individual hon. Member, but of the House. Indeed, in the Privy Council case of Prebble, Lord Browne-Wilkinson, on behalf of the Judicial Committee, said:

"The privilege protected by Article 9 is the privilege of parliament itself. The actions of any individual Member of Parliament, even if he has an individual privilege of his own, cannot determine whether or not the privilege of Parliament is to apply".

Those words seem to define clearly the dilemma that we face: are we to hand to individual hon. Members an immunity—a privilege—of the entire House, which has been such since article 9 was enacted?

What troubles me greatly is that we do not have the tradition in either this House or the other place of granting hon. Members immunities from suit. The Hoffmann amendment smacks of the continental tradition of giving members of legislatures immunities from suit or at least the right to pick and choose their way among the privileges available to such a member.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that far more hon. Members have enjoyed the protection of privilege than have suffered from its limiting effects. Probably every day in the House hon. Members take advantage of parliamentary privilege for the benefit of their constituents, whereas, once in a lifetime a case such as that affecting the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) comes before the courts showing itself to be an anomaly.

I am sure that all hon. Members have a degree of sympathy with the hon. Member for Tatton, who wishes to bring his action. I would not seek to obstruct his ability to do so, but it seems that the Hoffmann amendment is not the way to do it. Indeed, it is not clear that Lord Hoffmann thought that it was the way to do it. In the other place he said that it would be wrong not to test the opinion of the House and a Division then took place. One cannot escape noticing that, having commended the amendment to the other place, although Lord Hoffmann did not vote against it, he did not vote for it. That creates a puzzle. It seems to indicate that he may have had some misgivings about whether it was appropriate, although he did not express himself in terms of neutrality when moving the amendment.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: For the sake of clarification, I should make it clear that in his speech Lord Hoffmann gave the other place an indication of his intention not to vote on the issue. He indicated, in general terms, that he did not consider himself to be an advocate, but felt that in the circumstances it was necessary that the issue should be debated. It would be wrong to invest some sort of mystery into his actions.

Mr. Carlile: I read the debate and saw that he said something along those lines. However, it is right to reflect on the fact that it is not unusual for Law Lords to speak in debates or for them to vote. It is not all that unusual for Law Lords to move amendments where they feel that it is appropriate to do so, and it is normal for them to support those amendments. What happened in this case was highly unusual and we have not heard Lord

Hoffmann's explanation of why he acted as he did. Since that debate, it has been brought to my attention that many of their lordships thought that Lord Hoffmann's decision not to support his amendment was odd. They wish to hear an explanation of why he acted in that way.

On this important issue, it does not present much of a challenge to produce an amendment to article 9 of the Bill of Rights that would meet the requirements of the hon. Member for Tatton and the requirement of retaining the privilege as the privilege of the House.

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by direction of THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS *under Standing Order No. 16 (Time for taking private business), further proceeding stood postponed.*

Bodmin Moor Commons Bill *[Lords]*
(By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

7 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (South-East Cornwall): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill's provisions are modest. The Bill is essentially about land management and conservation. Its principal proposal is to establish a Bodmin moor commoners council on a statutory basis. All other objectives in the Bill relate to the functions, work and operations of the council.

The Bill does not seek to deal with the wider question of access. I must emphasise, however, that nothing in the Bill alters the availability of public access to the commons. Public access was discussed extensively when the Bill was considered in the other place, but at that stage the clause relating to wider public access was withdrawn.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Why is there not, under the Bill, a right of access to Bodmin moor for horse riders? May I remind my hon. Friend that a similar lack of provision under the Dartmoor Commons Bill in 1985 led to its defeat neck and crop?

Mr. Hicks: In view of my hon. Friend's experiences with the Dartmoor Commons Bill, I am pleased and relieved to tell him that the two petitions that were lodged against the Bodmin Moor Commons Bill have been withdrawn because the promoters have been successful in reaching an accommodation with the petitioners in respect of horse riding.

Although this Bill's objectives are limited, they are of real significance to the people who live and work on the moor. Local Bodmin moor communities are looking to the House today to give its support to what they seek and have asked their elected representatives to deliver.

The origins of the legislation go back to January 1992, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. At that time, he was considering extending the number of environmentally sensitive areas and many of us were anxious that Bodmin moor should be included in that list.

My right hon. Friend kindly agreed to receive a delegation from Cornwall, which I arranged and led. Those attending included the then hon. Member for North Cornwall, and I am pleased to see his successor here today in support of the Bill because—as you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will know with your west country links—since the redistribution of constituencies in 1983 the majority of Bodmin moor is now located in the North Cornwall constituency rather than in mine.

Members of that delegation included representatives from Cornwall county council, the two district councils that cover Bodmin moor—North Cornwall and Caradon—the Bodmin Moor Commoners Association, representatives from both the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association and the co-ordinator of the Minions Heritage Trust project.

Irrespective of the merits of the case for Bodmin moor to be designated an environmentally sensitive area, which we presented on that occasion, my right hon. Friend was

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unable to agree to our request. His reason was succinct and understandable. I recall vividly his saying to me on that occasion, "Bob—much as I would like to designate Bodmin moor an ESA, I am afraid that I cannot do this because there is no organisation or body in place with which I can treat"— a lovely old-fashioned word that is appropriate for my right hon. Friend to use. That was the sole reason for the rejection—that no statutory authority could guarantee to deliver the obligations that ESA status demands. I mention that small, but significant piece of political history because it explains concisely why the House is considering this Bill.

It may help if I say a brief word about the geography of Bodmin moor and about the nature and extent of present-day economic activities. From that, I hope that the House will recognise how important it is that the Bill should obtain its Second Reading today—so that in time, I hope, Bodmin moor can be designated an environmentally sensitive area.

Bodmin moor is the most south-westerly upland area in the United Kingdom. It is an unglaciated granite area with a distinctive topography. Although characterised by large tracts of semi-natural habitat, there is considerable landscape diversity. It almost goes without saying that a great variety of wildlife is found on the moor.

Those physical components are reflected in man's response to that environment over the centuries. Farming has undoubtedly always been the principal economic activity and has helped shape the environment as we know it today. The traditional land use of the commons is grazing by cattle and sheep belonging to occupants of moorland farms and to people who live adjacent to the moor and have grazing rights.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): My hon. Friend kindly supported me when I piloted the Dartmoor Commons Bill through the House in 1985 and I pay tribute to him for his support, but my concern about this Bill is that it excludes the statutory right of access for members of the public and the statutory right of the horseman. Other than that, I am entirely with him on the Bill, but why have those two important ingredients been left out? In Dartmoor national park, every walker has a statutory right to walk and every rider to ride across the moor, despite the landowners. As Bodmin moor is not a national park, my hon. Friend has a double duty to include such a provision in the Bill.

Mr. Hicks: Perhaps my hon. Friend was not here when I responded to a similar intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). As a result of an accommodation agreed by the Bill's promoters—Cornwall county council—the questions of access for horse riding are covered. The promoters initially tried very hard to accommodate the issue of pedestrian access. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—if I may refer to him in such terms in this debate—will deal specifically with the sequence of events in respect of the more general question of access. In the end, the promoters took the view that access was a national issue and that it would not be appropriate to deal with it in a Bill which, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who has been listening very carefully, will know, provides for a statutorily based authority to deal with conservation, land use, and so on with respect to Bodmin moor. Bodmin moor is not within a national park; it does not have such a statutory basis.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I have been present since the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech and I found the answer that he gave to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) very vague and imprecise. I am not certain that the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) has strengthened his assurances greatly in answering the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). We do not know what accommodations have been agreed with the petitioners. Will the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall give us an absolute guarantee that the Bill will not lead to a reduction in access to Bodmin moor for pedestrians and for horsewomen and horsemen?

Mr. Hicks: I am glad to be able to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Nothing in the Bill in any way reduces the existing rights of access. The fact that the two sets of petitioners have withdrawn their respective petitions as a consequence of accommodations agreed by the promoters shows that the petitioners are now satisfied that there will be no depletion of existing rights.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The hon. Gentleman keeps talking about "rights". As I understand it, there are very few rights to go on to the moor. It is simply custom and practice that enables people to go on to the moor. If the hon. Gentleman were able to guarantee that people could go on to the moor without restriction, it would go a long way to meet the concerns. He knows that the question of rights is somewhat doubtful. I am particularly interested in a commoner giving me the right to go on the moor. The hon. Gentleman referred to national legislation. Nationally, if I ask a farmer whether I can walk across his fields and he gives me permission, that is all that I need. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a commoner on Bodmin moor could give me such a right?

Mr. Hicks: The hon. Gentleman knows that the great majority of land historically and euphemistically referred to as commons is in private ownership. The House should be addressing the fundamental point that nothing in the Bill in any way reduces the existing practices—if the hon. Gentleman does not like my use of the word "rights"—concerning pedestrian access.

I shall turn to the powers of the new statutory body in a moment. It will be incumbent on that body to draw up certain proposals and plans of action to exclude certain activities which currently take place on the moor, and I am certain that the hon. Gentleman, the promoters and I are all anxious that those provisions should be put in place, as they will prevent the moor, which is already fragile, from deteriorating any further. As I said, one of the Bill's purposes is to promote conservation of the moor.

Mr. Steen: Before my hon. Friend moves on, may I thank him for his great generosity and customary patience? The Bill is obviously important to the west country, and my hon. Friend's experience of all the west country moors is well known to the House. My hon. Friend differentiates between Dartmoor and Bodmin

moor, both of which are owned by commoners, on the basis that Dartmoor is a national park while Bodmin moor is open moorland. National parks have national park authorities to protect walkers and riders. Surely walkers and riders need statutory rights to Bodmin moor, the more so since the moor is not under such authority. Bearing in mind that recreation and the environment are so important to hon. Members, particularly Conservative Members, should we not be giving walkers and riders some statutory rights? That is the trend; it started on Dartmoor. Surely with a little fine tuning such a right could be achieved in respect of Bodmin moor as well.

Mr. Hicks: I respectfully point out to my hon. Friend that I was born and bred on Dartmoor—indeed, my mother still lives in the Dartmoor national park. National parks legislation is national legislation. I forget the date of the original national parks legislation—

Mr. Flynn: It was 1947.

Mr. Hicks: That national legislation was passed by the House in 1947 or 1948. This Bill is a private Bill, promoted by Cornwall county council, to deal with a specific difficulty. That is why, for totally understandable reasons, the promoters feel that it is not appropriate to encompass the wider national question of access. Perhaps I may be allowed to make some progress.

I was saying that farming has undoubtedly always been the principal economic activity and has helped to shape and modify the environment as we know it today. The commons have traditionally been used for grazing sheep and cattle belonging to the occupants of moorland farms or to those who live adjacent to the moor and have grazing rights. Today, about 30 parcels of common land—large and small—are separately registered under the Commons Registration Act 1965.

I should also inform the House that Bodmin moor is classified as a less-favoured area under a European Community directive, and it lies in the Cornwall area of outstanding natural beauty. Other parts are recognised as areas of great landscape value, and many more specialist designations cover smaller areas such as sites of special scientific interest, or particular features including ancient monuments and archaeological sites, under the jurisdiction of statutory bodies such as English Nature and English Heritage.

I hope that that brief description of the moor will provide sufficient evidence to establish not only that it is crucial for the correct legislative framework to be put in place to safeguard the conservation and enhancement of the commons, but that that objective is compatible with—indeed, complementary to—a management of the commons that will allow those who live and work there to sustain their economic livelihood and thus to continue with both their traditional and their newer ways of life.

Mr. Steen: As a final intervention, may I ask my hon. Friend—

Mr. Hicks: How does my hon. Friend know that I have given way to him?

Mr. Steen: I thought that my hon. Friend would be generous. I knew that his customary generous habit would not desert him, even under great provocation.

I want to clarify one point. My hon. Friend differentiated between Dartmoor and Exmoor on the basis that the arrangements for Dartmoor are part of national legislation. But may I remind him that the Dartmoor Commons Bill of 1985 was introduced by Devon county council, just as this Bill is being introduced by Cornwall county council? It happens that the categorisation of the moors is different, but the type of promoter is the same. As Devon county council introduced a statutory right of access for walkers in its legislation, surely Cornwall county council can do the same.

Mr. Hicks: I am tempted to pass on to the House what my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) muttered to me—that the great deregulator is now apparently intervening to try to introduce greater regulation into our legislation. *[Interruption.]* No, I am not "screwing it up", as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams so bluntly puts it.

I was hoping that I would not have to bore the House by telling hon. Members so, but I happen to be a geographer by training. It is more than 26 years since I was involved with the subject, but I still remember that the original designation of Dartmoor as a national park resulted from national legislation. The Dartmoor Commons Bill, promoted by Devon county council, came later.

Perhaps I may be allowed to move on now. The Bill is being promoted by Cornwall county council and has the support not only of the two district councils affected, North Cornwall and Caradon, but of all the political groupings on all three of those councils—Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat, plus Mebyon Kernow and the independents.

Equally important is the fact that the Bill enjoys the support of the commoners and the landowners, who are clearly the key participants in the proposals, as well as organisations such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and local community and recreational groups. Especially significant is the fact that to the best of my knowledge there have been no objections either formal or informal from local people or groups who form part of national amenity and recreational organisations.

There is a strong consensus in Cornwall in support of the Bill—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams is listening when I say that. Indeed, many people throughout the duchy have been surprised and disappointed by the fact that the Bill has taken so long to reach the House, especially as it had its Second Reading in another place on 7 June 1994, almost two years ago. If it were to fail at this stage, people in Cornwall would be astonished and annoyed that Parliament, for whatever reasons, had failed to respond to their legitimate needs and aspirations.

As I have already said, the most important provision in the Bill is the establishment of a commoners council. Membership is defined in clause 3. The commoners would form the largest group on the council, but it would also include representatives of local authorities and landowners, as well as one or two other special categories. The remainder of the Bill is concerned with the structure, funding, functions and operations of the council.

I remind the House that one important duty of the council is to prepare a management plan after consultation with Cornwall county council, with statutory bodies such

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as English Nature, English Heritage and the Countryside Commission, and with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for the Environment. Furthermore, the management plan and any amendments will have effect only when approved by those two Ministers.

The council will also have the power to make regulations designed to control the exercise of common rights in the interests of the commons as a whole. The precise nature and purpose of those objectives are set out in clause 6. As well as having those statutory responsibilities to protect and manage the commons, the council will have powers to repair damage and to provide for open-air recreational uses of the land. Those provisions are the subject of the proposed amendments to the Bill that I have already mentioned, which have been negotiated with petitioners who have now withdrawn their objections.

It would be a tragedy if the Bill were not given a Second Reading tonight. Its provisions are what the local communities have asked for. I say unashamedly that in this day and age it would be extraordinary if the House were to deny a Second Reading to a measure that would protect and enhance the environment, promote the economic well-being of the local community of Bodmin moor, and facilitate public access, as well as rendering such access a more enjoyable experience.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I must announce to the House that Madam Speaker has not selected the motion for an instruction.

7.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate. It would be helpful if I gave the Government's view.

We welcome the Bill, which we believe will do a great deal of good. Both my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food strongly support the principle that common land should be subject to proper and effective management. The House will notice that the Minister for Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), is also present this evening.

Although comprehensive legislation along the lines of that proposed in 1986 by the Common Land Forum is neither feasible nor practical, in the White Paper, "Rural England", the Government undertook to support solutions tailored to local circumstances, such as those provided by the Bill.

I congratulate the promoters on their efforts to provide the means by which proper management of the commons of Bodmin moor can be accomplished.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister explain something to the House? He said that the Government had decided to drop the idea of national legislation on access to and regulation of the commons—a decision that disappoints many people. As I understood it, the argument was that such matters should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. So surely when we are dealing with a particular case, the Minister cannot justify failing to make access provision in the Bill.

Mr. Clappison: The Government are firmly of the view that there should be local solutions tailored to local needs. We welcome the Bill as an example of something that will give rise to a local solution. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) has clearly set out the position on access in response to repeated interventions, and has dealt with the effect that the legislation will have.

Mr. Steen: With respect, I do not think that the matter has been dealt with satisfactorily. There is a national park in Dartmoor and a similar, although smaller, landmass some 50 or 60 miles away at Bodmin. Your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, is very close to Dartmoor, and you will be aware that some 8 million people enjoy the beauties of Dartmoor, an increasing number of whom travel across Bodmin moor. Can the Minister explain why the public have no right to leave their cars and go on to the private land at Bodmin moor, but have a statutory right to do so on Dartmoor? I fear that the Bill will bring the landowners together, and will exclude the public who have no right to go on the moor. The Bill may protect the commons from overgrazing, but will not allow the public to have the same free access to Bodmin that they currently enjoy on Dartmoor.

Mr. Clappison: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, but he must realise the current position that was explained clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall, who made it clear that local solutions had been suggested for this case. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who is interested in local solutions, will appreciate the importance of seeking such a solution in this case.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I want to come to the aid of the Minister. For six years, I was a member of the Dartmoor national park committee, and I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steer) has answered his own question. Dartmoor was designated as a national park, and one of the reasons for that was that it was necessary in national legislation to provide for specific rights of access on Dartmoor.

Some might think that Bodmin moor should also have been designated as national park, but the Bill is not a national park designation Bill. If it were, it would come from the Treasury Bench and we could discuss it in those terms. However, the Minister is absolutely right and I support him—this is a local response to a local problem, and it is a private Bill for that reason. If the hon. Member for South Hams wants to join me in looking at the case for making Bodmin moor a national park, we can do so on another day, as it is a separate issue.

Mr. Clappison: A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the local question, and I made it clear at the outset that the Government are in favour of local solutions in this context. Among the local solutions that will be put in place, the Bill will seek to provide a comprehensive basis for the management of grazing on the commons and the promotion of the conservation of wildlife and habitats. I am sure that that objective will command wide support in the House this evening, and I therefore recommend that the Bill be given a Second Reading and be allowed to proceed in the usual way to Committee for detailed consideration.

7.32 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Although this is a private Bill, I wish to put on record the position of the official Opposition. We very much support the Bill in principle, and we accept that it is important for the reasons outlined by the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks). There is a need for proper management of the moor, particularly grazing management. That is an important conservation tool, although it can cause problems in terms of other grazing. Grazing can also be important in protecting plant species if managed correctly. There is a sound argument for the introduction of a commoners council, and we agree that it should be given the duty to draw up a management plan in consultation with the county council and the various statutory bodies. That will be a great advantage in bringing together the disparate ownership of the land, as the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall outlined.

For all those reasons, we think that the main thrust of the Bill is absolutely correct, and we would like to see it proceed. We have noted—and perhaps I can speak on a more personal level—the concerns about public access and the points that were reasonably made by the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). I recognise the issues and the differences between Dartmoor and Bodmin, but the Bill is being promoted in a similar way to the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 and I would have thought that it was not unreasonable to expect that the Bill would contain a provision for public access.

I am sorry that there has not been more agreement between the promoters and the considerable number of organisations which have petitioned against the Bill. These organisations are well respected, and include the Open Spaces Society, the British Mountaineering Council and the Youth Hostels Association. These are national and responsible organisations, and I am sure that their representations on access provision have been constructive and reasonable.

The 1985 Common Land Forum recommended that there should be access to common lands, and Labour thought that the recommendations were sensible and constructive. We are sorry that they have not been acted upon, and although it seemed at one stage that the Government were going to implement them, that has not taken place to date. I also note that the Countryside Commission has expressed great disappointment that the access arrangements have been withdrawn from the Bill. The commission has made it clear that it believes that such arrangements should be included if at all possible, and again that is not unreasonable.

In the discussions on the Bill, the issue of the right to roam—and whether it should be dealt with by a national policy or by legislation of the kind we are debating—has been raised. I understand the arguments, and the Labour party is committed to a qualified right to roam. The Country Landowners Association today published the document "Access 2000", which has a bearing on the Bill. The document contains a number of sensible suggestions, although I confess that I was surprised to see in the document and in some sections of the farming press that Labour is promoting a universal right to roam. I would like to state for the record that that has never been a right.

The CLA document contains a reference from the Liberal Democrats' submission—I do not know who provided it—saying that Labour is promoting a "near-universal" right to roam. That seems to suggest that we are advocating that people should go through other people's gardens or crops, or appear in their back yards. That was never the case. Our proposals on the right to roam apply to common land and to open moorland, but that right would have to be qualified in terms of sensible restrictions for land management and conservation management, and for the various rural activities which may require areas to be closed at times. There is a question as to whether we should wait for the next Labour Government to bring in the national policy or whether we should take this opportunity to ensure that there is adequate legislation at present. I am in favour of the former, but the House has been given an opportunity by the Bill and it should be taken.

I am concerned about the powers of the commoners council—I do not know whether the sponsor of the Bill can deal with this—because it appears that the council has the power to restrict access. While one could argue that it also has the power to encourage access—I do not dispute that—the fact remains that the majority of places on the council will be filled by landowners. They may well want to be reasonable and to encourage access in a balanced way. I am sure that that is so, but it may also be that, for whatever reason, that body may restrict access at certain times or to certain parts of the moor. I would welcome some clarification on that as it is a matter of concern, particularly for some of the petitioners.

Mr. Steen: Is not the point that the hon. Gentleman is making this: if a Bill is brought before the House for a particular area of the country, it must be a special and definable geographical area, not just a group of fields. Bodmin moor is definable and, that being so, special considerations apply. It is not like anyone's back yard or field—like Dartmoor, which happens to be a national park—Bodmin moor is a geographical area. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be rights for people to roam and walk in the area and that they should not be barred by a commoners council technically erecting a ring fence around it and saying, "You have no rights"?

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who knows the issues very well. I pay tribute to his involvement with the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985. Bodmin clearly is a definable area and it is not unreasonable that people should have access to it. Indeed, there is a long history of access to many parts of the moor and I am sure that local groups recognise that. The concern is over what may, or may not, happen and whether there is a legal right of access or a right that might at some stage be blocked for whatever reason. I think that I am right in saying that access to Dartmoor is governed by byelaws, which may well be a better regulatory approach.

Mr. Steen: The House gave a statutory right for riders and walkers to walk in the national park—I think that the Dartmoor Commons Act was the first private Bill to give such a right and it was introduced by a county council. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support my view that it is a slightly retrograde step if, 12 years later, we do not have the same rights for Bodmin.

Mr. Morley: I understand that and I agree. In that 12-year period, I imagine that the demand for public

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access has grown and that more groups now want such access. In that respect, the provision certainly seems a retrograde step. Given all the sensible measures in the Bill and all the worthwhile things that it is trying to do, this seems to be an opportunity to tackle the issue of public access.

With a commoners council and a Bill of this type, an application can be made for Bodmin to become an environmentally sensitive area. Again, that is a sensible move and the Opposition would support it. ESAs have a valuable role to play in supporting local farmers, particularly in the less-favoured areas where incomes are low, and ensuring a proper management regime within which they can operate within. That will involve such things as maximum stocking densities, which are very important. Such schemes have worked well. ESAs involve public money, however, and if we are putting public money into land management schemes it is not unreasonable for the public, who are paying, to derive some benefit. One of the benefits is access to the moor. I accept that environmental management is also a benefit.

Mr. Bennett: There are two arguments about letting people go into environmentally sensitive areas. The first is that people can see that the money is being well spent. The second concerns balance and, if one is reducing stocking levels, it ought to be possible to allow more access.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I know of his long-standing interest in rights of access. I strongly endorse the need for balance. We are talking of a balance between the needs of landowners, farmers, the local community and national recreation groups. We very much support that balance and I am not sure that it is quite right in the Bill as it stands.

Mr. Steen: I have walked over Dartmoor for many years and occasionally over Bodmin moor. If the promoters fear that, by putting in a statutory right of access, they will be swamped by charabancs of tourists, they should realise that Bodmin is even more inhospitable to walk over than Dartmoor—it is the most difficult and treacherous moor. The hon. Gentleman and the landowners will be relieved to know that giving the public a statutory right of access would not result in the place being covered with thousands of tourists.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member knows the area well and I am sure that he is right. I have been researching statutory access to help with Labour's policy formation. I had talks about the New Forest, which is very much a honeypot area, with the Forestry Commission. The commission's surveys show that a high proportion of people do not stray far from their cars when they park in the car parks provided, another group of people might walk further, but do not stray from the footpaths and only a comparatively small number of serious walkers go into the more remote and difficult areas—they are responsible people when it comes to having regard to the environment.

Mr. Steen: Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman by giving him the figures for Dartmoor—the figures for Bodmin would not be dissimilar—; 70 per cent. of the people who travel across the moor do not stop, but admire the view while driving slowly and carefully, 28 per cent. stop their cars and walk up to 100 yd and only the remaining 2 or 3 per cent. go beyond 100 yd. If that figure is the same for Bodmin, the promoters and the landowners have nothing to fear.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman's figures are similar to those of the Forestry Commission and that puts the issue into perspective.

There are honeypot areas that attract large numbers of people and require management because of the pressures on the environment, but I am not sure that Bodmin moor is one of those areas as it is remote. In that respect, I am surprised that the promoters have not reached some accommodation with the people who have been petitioning against the Bill. The Opposition want the Bill to progress and to become law. We want an accommodation between those groups.

In environmentally sensitive areas, an element of public subsidy is involved. It is not, therefore, unreasonable for access to be one of the criteria that is taken into account. One can achieve a balance between the not unreasonable desire for recreation and the management needs of local farmers and landowners. If access were a problem for environmental or management reasons, perhaps the commoners council could deal with it. We do not disagree with such an approach. We want a constructive approach.

There are not many opportunities to promote legislation such as this Bill, which contains so many worthwhile elements. It is also an opportunity to give people a right of access. I would have thought that Cornwall county council would have jumped at that. I understand that originally the landowning interests were not especially averse to it.

The Country Landowners Association document that was launched today makes it clear that it wants to promote increased access. That is a worthwhile objective. The CLA has the opportunity to support the principles outlined in its document though a Bill such as this. I hope that its promoters take note of the points made by the groups that have petitioned against it and especially those by the hon. Member for South Hams, who put his case very well. The Government should bear them in mind, especially as they originally said that they would support the findings of the Common Land Forum. If they once thought that the forum's 1985 recommendations were reasonable, this is an opportunity to incorporate some of them in a measure that would meet with universal support.

7.50 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I had hoped to be able to speak at the end of the debate so that I could respond to as many as possible of the points made by hon. Members. However, I was forewarned that if I did, I might be squeezed out by hon. Members with a different agenda. I shall try to respond to the points that have been raised so far.

I must declare an interest—not financial, but personal. I live on the edge of Bodmin moor and I walk on it almost every weekend. Some weekends, I spend more time on it than in my garden, which results in calamity for the latter. I have had a long association with the moor and with Dartmoor, as I was previously a councillor in Devon. My mother unfortunately emigrated to England and

married a Devonian. When I returned to Cornwall, I spent much time getting to know the moor. I have a long family association with the area going back to 1066.

I have also had a long association with the various access organisations in Cornwall and nationally. I endorse the view of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) about the value of the Common Land Forum. If his statement is a commitment that an incoming Labour Government will promote legislation on the basis of the forum's proposals, I very much welcome it.

As the Minister said, legislation to promote access to common land must be national. It would be inappropriate to use a local private Bill as a stalking horse. However, I welcome on behalf of the promoters the fact that both the Labour Front-Bench spokesman and the Government have committed themselves to the Bill's principles and to its passage to a Second Reading. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks), who eloquently promoted the Bill, both today and on many previous occasions locally, will join me in welcoming that.

Clearly, there is a problem with the Bill, but I believe that it can and should be resolved. The Bill and the environmentally sensitive area status that we hope that it will permit are primarily concerned with the conservation, and the environmental and agricultural management of the moor.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe made copious references to ESAs. I share his concern that public money should not only be invested wisely but seen to be invested wisely. He and the Minister for Rural Affairs, who was also in the Chamber and supports the Bill, would agree that ESAs are not inherently about public access. Several of them preclude public access because the ecology of their habitats is so sensitive and vulnerable that public access would be improper. Neither in national nor in European Union terms does ESA status inherently increase or change rights of public access, and nor should it. Its primary purpose is environmental enhancement.

The statement that the promoters released to coincide with the Bill clearly sets out its purpose and meets some of the objections that have been made this evening. First and foremost, it would grant powers to promote grazing management and conservation of the commons. The target is specific and carefully defined. As the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall said, it has had the full rigour of examination in the other place over a long period. It has been the subject of petitions and much local consultation. He and I have met many organisations and individuals during the Bill's passage through the other place and I endorse his statement that it enjoys the widest possible support in Cornwall—including support from both environmental and access organisations.

It is true that the commoners council is empowered to regulate the exercise of common rights in the interests of the commons as a whole but, as the promoters' statement says:

"In discharging that duty the Council is to have due regard to the conservation of the commons and to the existing permitted use of the commons as a place of resort for open air recreation."

Mr. Bennett: What does "due regard" mean? Does it not mean that as long as the council considers the present access carefully, it will be entitled to alter it?

Mr. Tyler: I will come back to that as my speech unfolds.

The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) has just slipped out of the Chamber but I assure him that it is recognised that there are growing pressures on the moor from peaceful recreation. However, there are also pressures from less peaceful recreations. I know, from my experience as a member and vice-chairman of the Dartmoor national park committee for five years, that Dartmoor has already experienced major problems. It is important that powers should be available, for example, to control access for four-wheeled vehicles which not only damage the moor's ecology but make it difficult for other people to enjoy peaceful recreation such as my weekend walks.

There is considerable anxiety in Cornwall about the state of the commons on Bodmin moor. Some suffer from overgrazing while others are insufficiently grazed. As a result, environmental quality is visibly deteriorating in several parts of the moor at an alarming rate. It is intended that the primary purpose of the commoners council should be to take action to correct that deterioration. Such action will involve considerable restrictions on the activities of some local commoners, but they accept that in the interests of the wider community and of the long-term stewardship of the land.

I emphasise that there is nothing in the Bill that alters the availability of the commons for public access. It may be that a better definition of open country, as the Common Land Forum has suggested, would, in the long term, greatly benefit Bodmin moor and other parts of the UK. However, it would be inappropriate to use a private Bill to pioneer such a new definition. I reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall that the petitions against the Bill lodged by the British Horse Society and the owners of a riding establishment on the edge of the moor have been withdrawn because they have accepted that the promoters have met their concerns.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) mentioned public access. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that discussions have taken place, not only during the passage of the Bill through the Lords and locally, but in the past few days, in anticipation of this debate, and in recognition of the concerns that gave rise to the attempt to lay an instruction before the House and therefore the Committee.

Last week—I am sure that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish will not mind me saying so, because it is material to the discussion—there was a useful meeting, at which I was present, between the promoter and the hon. Gentleman, and at that meeting we sought to find a way to meet his concerns. It was suggested that a voluntary agreement on access might be in place before Royal Assent or before the Act came into operation. That was the subject of some discussion locally. I understand that, yesterday. the promoter, Cornwall county council, agreed that it would seek to achieve that in whatever form was appropriate to the legislation, to enable the Bill to proceed.

I strongly endorse what the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe said about the need for balance. That balance is well understood by the promoter and all the organisations that have promoted the Bill. That is why I am delighted to tell the House that I understand that the

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promoter is able to put on record tonight that it agrees to seek a voluntary access agreement with the landowners and the commoners of the Bodmin moor commons.

Mr. Bennett: What the hon. Gentleman says goes 90 per cent. of the way towards what we want. We now need evidence of the good intent of the county council. All we need to hear from the hon. Gentleman is that the county council will not seek Royal Assent until the access agreement is in place because, if it goes that far, we can simplify the procedures tremendously. I do not doubt the good will of the county council, but if one or two of the more awkward commoners were to refuse to go along with an access agreement, there is little that the county council can do as things stand. If, however, the county council were to give an undertaking tonight, or very soon after, that it would not go ahead with Royal Assent until the access agreement were in place, I do not say that we could all go home, but we could all go home without saying much more.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but he will appreciate that I am a Member of the House, not the promoter. It would be much more appropriate for the specific wording of the statement that he requires to be dealt with in Committee, which is the right place for petitions to be heard; the hon. Gentleman is not a petitioner in his own right.

Following the meeting that I mentioned, at which the hon. Gentleman was most generous with his time—and his coffee—and during which we made good progress, I am able to convey to the House the assurance that the promoter, Cornwall county council, has agreed to seek a voluntary access agreement along the lines suggested at our meeting last week, and the county council has already set in motion the appropriate machinery to make that action take place forthwith.

I accept, as I am sure does the promoter, that that may not meet all the wishes of the Ramblers Association and the Open Spaces Society, which have lodged petitions against the Bill and which, if the Bill is read a Second time tonight, will be entitled to appear before the Committee. However, the Bill is not about compulsion, and Cornwall county council does not propose to embody compulsion in the Bill. That is borne out by negotiations that the promoter has already carried out, as I have said, with the two other petitioners—the British Horse Society and the T.M. international school of horsemanship.

Amendments have been suggested by those two petitioners, and will be submitted for the Committee's approval if the Bill is read a Second time tonight. The purpose of the amendments is to ensure that the passing of the Bill and the coming into being of the commoners council will not change the position to the detriment of the British Horse Society or its members on or near Bodmin moor or of the T.M. international school of horsemanship. As a result of that agreement, those two petitions have been withdrawn.

The amendments would provide that the commoners council, when preparing the management plan that the Bill requires to be prepared, must have due regard to the existing permitted use of open-air recreation. That includes any existing permitted use by ramblers. Were that not to be the case, I should not be supporting the Bill tonight, because I believe, as do many others in and around Bodmin moor, that that existing permitted use is of great importance.

The hon. Member for South Hams is probably right that only 2 or 3 per cent. of people who visit Bodmin moor walk miles, as I do. Nevertheless, sometimes we have invasions. Only a few years ago, about 30,000 people came for the so-called White Goddess festival on Davidstow moor, on common land in my constituency, and caused chaos to farmers and everyone else in the local community. It is not inappropriate to be aware that such possible threats can not only destroy the habitat and environment and prevent the quiet enjoyment of the moor by people who walk or ride, but cause immense damage to the local community as a whole.

The suggested amendments would also ensure that the commoners council makes certain that unlawful interference with the commons is precluded, but also ensures that recreational access on foot or horseback does not cause material damage. There is no intention to destroy the sensitive balance that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe rightly mentioned.

There is almost unanimous support for the Bill throughout Cornwall, as the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall said. Conservationists and farmers alike are looking to the House to create an effective framework for more sensitive management of the commons on Bodmin moor. I hope that they will not be disappointed.

8.6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I should first declare an interest that does not need to be included in the Register. It is only fair to tell hon. Members that I am an honorary life member of the Ramblers Association and vice-president of the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society. I have spoken on behalf of walkers many times in the House, but I have also spoken several times about the private Bill procedure, which I find very, very unsatisfactory indeed.

As a result of efforts in the House on occasions to delay Bills, it was possible to pass the Public Works Bill, and we have substantially reduced the number of private Bills that come before the House, so we now deal with private Bills rarely. Nevertheless, it is a very unsatisfactory procedure for dealing with the Bill before us.

Traditionally, Bills were used to promote railways, canals and other major works. The tradition grew up that, as the Bill progressed through the two Houses of Parliament, it had to become progressively narrower. In other words, no one's rights could be taken away as the Bill progressed; all that could happen was that people could be exempted from the Bill.

In this case, we have a very odd procedure. When Cornwall county council started to promote the Bill, there was a balance in it. The rights of access were balanced by the right of the commoners to regulate the legislation. By a procedure that I have never quite understood, which is not quite a lottery—I suspect that it is more Machiavellian than that—some Bills start in the House of Lords and some start in the Commons.

In the case of a public Bill, if the Lords remove something from the Bill, it is easy for us to disagree with them and put it back in; or, if the Lords put something

into the Bill, we can remove it. If necessary, the Bill can shuttle backwards and forwards, until eventually a meeting takes place between the two sides, at which usually one or other gives way.

With a Bill such as this, however, if the House of Lords has removed a provision from it, usually the House of Commons cannot put it back. Rather foolishly, the House of Lords removed the provision that guaranteed access. The question is: do we have the right to put access back in the Bill as it goes into Committee? At some stage, that could become a major point at issue.

I hope that we can find a way around the problem and thereby avoid some fraught proceedings in this House. I have a suggestion to make. I have talked to the promoters, and proposed that we need not have an access agreement on the face of the Bill. It is perfectly possible for county councils to draw up access agreements, just as it is possible for national parks to make access agreements under legislation dealing with the countryside and dating from the late 1940s.

It would be quite possible for the county council in this case to put in place an access agreement to cover the relevant area before the Bill received Royal Assent. That would restore the balance that we began with. If we do not restore that balance, the people in Cornwall who did not oppose the Bill originally because it contained access provisions will feel cheated because they will not have had the opportunity to petition the House of Lords, assuming as they did that the Bill contained measures of which they approved.

Mr. Tyler: I assure the hon. Gentleman that to my knowledge—I do not know whether the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) can confirm this—there are no petitioners or objectors from Cornwall to the Bill in its present form.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is misled. I am assured by the ramblers and some of the other petitioners that some local groups still object strongly. More to the point, one commoner and two other people telephoned me this afternoon, all claiming to come from Cornwall. Their accents served to confirm that. I rang one of them back, and he was certainly on a Cornwall number, so I have no reason to believe that they were not ringing me in good faith. They said that they had been cheated, and would never have supported such a Bill without the access provisions.

When the county council published notices about the Bill, it still contained the access provisions. These people therefore did not realise that they should petition the House of Lords to strengthen the access provisions. Now the latter have been taken out, so a group of people's rights have been disregarded. I suggest that that is a serious matter.

Mr. Tyler: All I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that the exclusion from the Bill has been widely known about in Cornwall for many months—as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, it was in the Lords for a long time. I have met innumerable organisations and people in Cornwall during that period—I suspect that the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall has, too—and no doubt the promoters have had representations as well. I find it extraordinary that the only person in the House who seems to have received these complaints is the hon. Gentleman. We certainly have heard nothing about these people.

Mr. Bennett: I will not pursue the issue now. I merely suggest that there is a way out of an impasse that might involve a great deal of argument and procedure. I have met the promoters: we are very close to a deal which would virtually eliminate the problems.

The Bill is being debated today. It will then go into Committee, where no doubt petitioners will want to make their case. Members of the Committee may be sympathetic to the petitioners, so there will be some discussion as to how far access can be reinstated at that stage.

My guess is that the Bill will emerge from Committee just before the summer recess. If it does, it is possible that the Chairman of Ways and Means will find time for it to be debated before the recess—but I am doubtful. There are rumours that there may be no carry-over in the autumn. If there is no carry-over, that may present difficulties. There will have to be a revival motion, either in the autumn or in the next Parliament. Everyone knows that revival motions are debatable, and can prompt a great deal of discussion and argument.

I can see this Bill stretching out a long way into the future. For my part, I do not want to be involved in stretching it out. I hope that the county council can thrash out an access agreement and get it in place so that the promoters can tell the Committee that an access agreement has been reached with the county council, using the powers that it already has. The petitions can then be withdrawn, the Bill can become an unopposed Bill, and it can return to the House in late June or early July. The Bill can then proceed unopposed to Royal Assent by the autumn, and management procedures and access arrangements can be put in place.

There is a good prospect of some sort of agreement being reached. We are asking the promoters to go only a short distance further. The county council has said that it will seek an agreement—it need only take one more step. I admit that that will change the balance of power, but if the county council is keen to get the Bill through at the moment, objections to it from just one or two commoners can stop it; whereas, once the balance of power is changed and restored to what it was when the Bill arrived in the Lords, there is a good chance that agreement will be reached.

I strongly contend that the promoters have a chance now to get their legislation quickly and cheaply and to satisfy the commoners and local people who want their access guaranteed. National groups such as the ramblers would also like to witness a local agreement that has been sensibly reached.

I understand the local problem. I am aware that some—not all—of the commoners are on low incomes and are under pressure to put more stock on the parts of the moor to which they are entitled. They see people in other parts of the country being paid taxpayers' money not to put stock on land but to manage environmentally sensitive areas better and with less stock—thereby preserving the countryside. These local people rightly ask why the same cannot apply to Bodmin moor.

What is preventing that is the fact that no commoner can enter into agreement with the Government about stock levels, because any other commoner can wreck the whole

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procedure. That is why the legislation is needed. But if the land is to be managed for the benefit of commoners by limiting stock numbers, access must also be successfully managed.

What is the point of paying out large sums of taxpayers' money to protect environmentally sensitive areas? The answer is that they are part of our heritage, and the argument goes that people should be able to go and look at their inheritance.

I got out the two maps that cover the area in question. I once walked over Bodmin moor, although I admit that it was a wet, misty day, and I saw little besides the footpath in front of me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What about the beast?

Mr. Bennett: I certainly did not see the beast. When I walked the moor, the stories about the beast had not yet surfaced. I do not think that it would have frightened me off, but it might have added some amusement to the walk, especially in the rain. My hon. Friend may have all sorts of ideas about Bodmin moor, but I shall not be sidetracked.

I took the trouble to look at the maps of Bodmin moor, and I was disappointed to see that very few footpaths had been recorded. As many people visit it and it has obvious attractions, particularly in good weather, why are so few footpaths recorded on it?

Clearly, over the years the custom and practice has been that people have walked on the moors and have not been stopped. When rights of way had to be recorded as a result of the legislation in the 1940s, few people found it necessary to claim a right of way, because, de facto, they could walk on the moors. As there is de facto access, one might ask why we need an access agreement.

The practice appears to have changed, however. I can think of large areas of the countryside that used to have de facto access. I am particularly conscious of the Berwyns and the Arans in north Wales, where for more than 100 years people could walk without restriction, until a small group of farmers decided that there should be no access and no right of way, and that people could not walk on that land. We cannot continue having merely de facto access to the moors. It has to be in legislation or an agreement that is worked out by the county council.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, access agreements have worked well throughout the country. There was a tremendous amount of conflict about the peak district in the 1930s, and some of it lasted until the 1950s when people were denied access, but the Peak District national park managed to get access agreements in place. By and large, those agreements have worked.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the peak district, where there is intense demand for walking and recreational pursuits because of the huge conurbations in the surrounding areas, access agreements have not damaged walkers' access to the open moorland?

Mr. Bennett: I was making that very point, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The more access is agreed, the better it works. Many farmers have said to me, "Twenty years ago, I was a bit worried about the access agreement, but it is now working well. I am pleased to see the walkers on my land, and I prefer them to use the access land rather than the footpaths, as one or two of the footpaths are being worn away. It is much nicer to see them striding out on to the moor."

I have to say to those who are concerned about Bodmin moor—and the commoners who may be doubtful about them—that access agreements work well. Another important consideration for the commoners is that the county council will pay them a little money. I shall not say that too loud, because the county council does not have a great deal of money, but it will pay for access agreements.

Mr. Morley: I understand that the commoners originally supported the idea of a statutory right of access. Can my hon. Friend explain say why they have changed their minds during the Bill's passage?

Mr. Bennett: I am puzzled about that. One of the people who telephoned me today was a commoner. He told me that he thought access was a good idea, and that other commoners wanted it. He was trying to put the blame on some of the bigger landowners who have some rights to the common. He said that Bodmin was caught up in a national argument and that, because the ramblers and the Open Spaces Society argued that access should be granted, one or two other organisations had advised the commoners not to agree to an access agreement, as it might undermine their national stance.

It is disappointing that the commoners, having initially supported access agreements, have now backed off, and some would prefer not to have them. My evidence is that access agreements work and could benefit local people who would be getting a little money not just from the Government for using lower stocking levels, but from the county council for letting people walk on the land.

I now turn to de facto access. Local people have told me that there is no problem because they can get on to the land. I have mentioned the problem in the Arans, where there was de facto access but it was revoked. In most parts of the country, if one wants to get access to land, one can use rights of way or access agreements. One can also say to the landowner: "Do you mind if I walk across your land?" I have often asked the farmer whether I could walk through his farmland either to go for a walk or to look at a historic or archaeological site. Farmers very rarely refuse access.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): They set the dogs on you.

Mr. Bennett: I know that there can be problems and that people are not always made welcome, but my experience is that, if one asks nicely, one is normally allowed onto the land.

What happens on Bodmin moor? Presumably one would have to find one of the commoners and say, "Please may I go on to the land?" and one would then be able to walk across it. The commoner I spoke to today—Mr. Budge—told me that he was not quite sure. He said, "I always tell people that everyone goes on anyway, so you don't need permission, but I do not think that I have the right to give permission, because I am not the landowner. I have only commoners' grazing rights."

So who is entitled to grant people permission to go on to the commons? Mr. Budge, as a commoner, could ask me to look at his stock, round it up or do something else, and I would then have the right to be on the common, but if I just wanted to have a look at it, I am not quite sure how the de facto right would work.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend would have to ask Prince Charles.

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend may wish to lead me in that direction, but I know nothing about Prince Charles, and would not wish to involve him in the debate.

Mr. Skinner: Does not Prince Charles own part of Cornwall?

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that, if my hon. Friend catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will be able to develop that argument further.

Mr. Tyler: Did the hon. Gentleman say that the commoner who had been in touch with him today was a certain Mr. Budge? If so, perhaps I should let him know that Mr. Budge is no longer a commoner, as he no longer farms on the edge of the moor, so he no longer has any common rights. He may also have a somewhat different agenda from that of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bennett: I shall not go into detail. Mr. Budge raised a particular point with me. If the hon. Gentleman disputes it, I understand that the commoners originally agreed to access. If the hon. Gentleman is denying that the commoners originally agreed to access, I shall gladly give way to him. As I understand it—I think that Mr. Budge was perfectly correct on that point—the commoners agreed to access when the legislation was first proposed. If that is wrong, will the hon. Gentleman please intervene?

Mr. Tyler: It is perfectly true that everybody tried to find acceptable terms in which the access problem could be resolved. I and the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall did our very best to find such terms. We found it impossible to approve and support appropriate terms for the Bill. If we could have done so, we would have been delighted, but it became increasingly apparent that such terms were appropriate only for national legislation, and not for a private Bill.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman attended the negotiations last week, when he said that the county council—in good faith—would seek an access agreement. He cannot have it both ways. Either an access agreement is impossible because the commoners cannot agree among themselves, or we can negotiate an access agreement. We should put that idea to the test: let us delay the Bill's progress and put the access agreement in place. The Bill could then race through the House. The hon. Gentleman has said that the county council will use its best endeavours to reach an agreement. That is one approach.

Mr. Skinner: Is it a Liberal county council?

Mr. Bennett: It is a funny county council—I think that there is no overall control. However, I do not wish to go into the composition of the council. I want to concentrate on the question of access, and particularly the problem of guaranteeing de facto access.

As the Bill stands currently, the commoners will have the right to regulate access. I approve of that provision. If a part of the moor is being damaged through over-use, or should be burnt in line with heather management, it is logical that people should be denied access to that area for a specified period. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has powers to prevent people from entering certain areas where diseased animals have been discovered. It would be logical for an access agreement to contain the right to suspend access in certain circumstances, such as in the event of a fire risk.

However, the rules regarding fire are quite odd. The Environment Committee found that almost all the access agreements in the peak district prevented people from roaming on the moors when the fire risk was high. However, the attitude in the New Forest is to allow as many people as possible on to the moor when the fire risk is high, so that they may give an early warning of fire and almost certainly assist with fighting it. An access agreement should address such issues, and I argue strongly that we should try to put such an agreement in place.

Some of the blame must lie with the Government. A proposal emerged from the Common Land Forum to deal with commons up and down the country. The Government were so impressed with the forum's recommendations that they made a manifesto commitment in 1987—which I think was repeated in 1992—to legislate in that area. That legislation would involve recognising grazing rights and allowing access to commons. Sadly, the Moorland Society nobbled the Government. The big landed interests—I suppose that they are still the Tory grandees—said no, and the Government stupidly gave in to them.

As a result of that backdown, there have been continuing problems with our commons. It is interesting to note that the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association have begun to realise that it is not in the interests of those who work on the land to keep others out. I do not approve totally of the Country Landowners Association publication that was released today, but it is now talking about encouraging access. It says that access should be negotiated locally.

In the case of Bodmin moor, access could be negotiated locally. If organisations such as the Country Landowners Association and the NFU want to argue that access should be negotiated locally and agreed on the basis of existing access provisions in earlier legislation, they must demonstrate that the agreements are working. If we cannot have access agreements on Bodmin moor, perhaps we should take a different approach—for example, right to roam legislation, or perhaps a walkers charter. That approach would have many advantages, because it gives the walker rights and responsibilities. Anyone who cares about the countryside would favour that approach.

I do not like going into the countryside carrying a pair or wirecutters in my back pocket to cut barbed wire that has been placed across a footpath. I do not like having to telephone or write to a county council to report obstructions on footpaths. I do not roam the countryside looking for conflict: I go to the country to enjoy the peace and quiet. That enjoyment is spoilt by arguments and problems about access.

[Mr. Bennett]

I want to see a way out. Nothing would please me more than if the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and the Moorland Society were to rush to put access agreements in place across the country in the next 12 or 18 months. Perhaps that would reduce the need for right to roam legislation. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe will introduce right to roam legislation as a Minister in the next Labour Government. However, both the NFU and the Country Landowners Association say that they support this Bill. Therefore, they must demonstrate that access agreements can be successfully negotiated locally.

The next question is, who will serve on the Bodmin moor commoners council? I understand that the Bill contains a fairly complicated procedure for appointing people to that council.

Mr. Flynn: Is it a quango?

Mr. Bennett: I suppose it is. However, its members are also shareholders—those who have grazing rights have a right to participate in the election of commoners who can serve on the council. We should ensure that the access groups are represented on that body, and have a veto over restrictions on access.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) said that I would approve of some of the powers to restrict activities on the moors. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and I would like to stop four-wheel-drive vehicles with bull bars entering moorland. However, if we deny access to four-wheel-drive vehicles, to people on mountain bikes, trail riders and so on, how will we differentiate between those powers and the powers that allow access to people on foot? What about those people who enter moorland on foot with the intention of engaging in other activities, such as hang-gliding, para-gliding and so on? We should have in place a management access agreement in order to regulate those activities properly.

There is another question regarding archaeological sites. There are traces of early civilisations all over Bodmin moor, and people like to visit those sites. Some of the sites and structures have been nicely preserved by English Heritage. But it can be more interesting and more fun wondering whether a shape on the ground is a geological formation or is the result of human activity—one can use one's imagination.

Currently, there is no legislative provision to allow people to visit such sites, and I should like to see those rights enshrined in access agreements. However, we must again consider regulation. Many people who like to visit historical sites take their metal detectors. I have seen them on many occasions: as soon as something sets off their metal detector, they begin scrabbling around and digging to try to find the object. Usually they find a penny or 10p piece that another metal detectorist dropped earlier; but on some occasions they start to dig things up. I certainly do not approve of people just digging around on those sites. It should be properly regulated.

I hope that commoners will have the opportunity to represent all those interests and that they can put into some access agreement a balance between all those different groups.

I should like to return to the point I made at the beginning of my speech. There is an opportunity for a deal that satisfies everyone—a statutory access agreement in the current legislation that would be set up by the county council on a voluntary basis, which would then allow quick passage by means of this Bill, and let the graziers get the management in place.

I think that the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall suggested that it is now five years since he first went to Ministers to plead for this to be designated an environmentally sensitive area. I can understand how commoners who are on low incomes are aggrieved that it has taken so long, but I must tell him that, if the matter continues to drag on through the House for any length of time, it will be because of the failure of those same commoners to agree an access provision.

I hope that, even at this late stage, people who are promoting the Bill will appreciate that there will be sustained opposition to it unless concessions are achieved. Sustained opposition will cost the promoters money and will delay the Bill. For all those reasons, I hope that we can get an undertaking very quickly that will satisfy the petitioners—the Ramblers Association and the Open Spaces Society—that we can have an access agreement, and that the commoners can get the proper management that they deserve. Before the Bill progresses very much further, I hope that some sort of agreement can be reached.

8.42 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who speaks with such authority on this matter. I think that all hon. Members enjoyed his succinct speech. I hope to be equally brief.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned the private Bill procedure. There was a young hon. Member who said that the private Bill procedure is archaic, slow, inefficient and long overdue for reform. His name was Benjamin Disraeli. There have been some changes in the private Bill procedure since then, but much of his criticism is still valid.

Many hon. Members will remember the painful experience of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which was in the House for longer than the first world war lasted. I think that it occupied more of the House's time than any Bill since the repeal of the Corn Laws. I do not say that as any form of threat to anyone. I remember a time during that Bill's passage when I was in the Chamber at 5 am, passionately advocating the cause of retaining the habitat of the barking Grangetown rat. Of course many hon. Members were talking on behalf of other forms of wildlife, such as the bird. There is a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, but no society for the protection of the barking Grangetown rat, and, if there were, it certainly would not be a royal society.

There is a concentration on certain attractive forms of wildlife and not on those equally rare forms of wildlife to which we should pay attention.

Mr. Morley: I remember very well those debates late through the night. I inform my hon. Friend that the black rat that he mentioned is a protected species.

Mr. Flynn: I am delighted to hear that, but the species that I mentioned is fictitious. I mentioned it in the early

hours of the morning to make a point about the attempts that were being made to protect creatures that were reduced to their last 28 billion in the world. I should return to speaking about the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I call on the hon. Gentleman to tell us something about the Bill.

Mr. Flynn: I shall not try your patience any longer, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We must examine the Bill and consider the concession that is sought by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish. All hon. Members would say that we are in favour of the Bill's general purpose, but that we have misgivings about what is absent from it—the guarantee of rights of access to all those who use this wild and beautiful part of the country, which is part of our heritage.

I was enthusiastic about the suggestion that access must be denied to those who abuse our countryside with noise pollution, light pollution and—the worst pollution we have seen in recent years—the barbarous, four-by-four vehicles that have caused so much damage to our green lanes and countryside. They should be denied access. There is a particular mindset among the people who buy those vehicles. They usually had Tonka cars when they were children, and they grow up to want those great, chunky, inefficient and unsafe vehicles. Their effect on green lanes is disastrous, leaving huge ruts and great damage. Some roads in Wales have suffered greater damage in the past 20 years because of four-by-fours than they have suffered since they were built by the Romans. One of those is Sarn Helen.

One may ask why a Welsh Member of Parliament should have a keen interest in this Bill. We see the area as part of our common heritage of national life, but I also have a particular interest in the relationship between Wales and Cornwall. The hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) used two words of the Cornish language: Mebyon Kernow. I remember tabling a question about the future of Brythonic languages. Many of the names on Bodmin are Brythonic names. The Department inquired what I was talking about. I made it clear that I wanted an answer about the Cornish language, and the answer was given to me by the Secretary of State for Wales.

I do not know whether the Government have some secret agenda to annex Cornwall to Wales and to reunite those two ancient nations, which were once united but, unfortunately, divided by the immigration of Saxons, who came to these islands and divided those two groups of people. In Wales there is a legitimate interest in those groups.

A great amount of play has been made about what is claimed to be the Bill's universal support, but that is not so according to the information that I have. I know that the Ramblers Association has complained and has many misgivings about it. Members of that organisation have told me that they know of no local access bodies that agree with the view that the Bill is without fault. The most prominent access bodies are of course the Ramblers Association, the Open Spaces Society and the splendid Youth Hostels Association. They have all petitioned against the Bill. To suggest that the local branches of those organisations are somehow in favour of it is, as I understand it, untrue. I hope that that point will be answered by the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall.

Mr. Hicks: May I clarify my remarks, which are on the record? I said that no local amenity or recreational groups, organisations or societies, to the best of my knowledge, have expressed their opposition to the provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Flynn: I should be happy to improve the hon. Gentleman's knowledge, because my understanding is that there are local branches of those organisations and that it is entirely misleading to suggest that they disagree with their national organisations in any way.

We are opposed to access to all parts of the moors by those who would damage them, but other groups that have a keen interest in the flora and fauna of Bodmin moors should have open access to them. For the sake of brevity, I shall mention only one such organisation—the Butterfly Conservation Society. Earlier this year, I had the great privilege to present the prizes in its annual photograph competition. The taking of such photographs requires generous access to the habitats of the butterflies and moths that are part of the life of Bodmin moor.

We must not treat this as a matter of no importance. We all love butterflies, which are beautiful, living jewels of nature: we love the enormous variety and subtlety of their colours, and note the differences that occur from one area to another only a few miles away. Butterflies are important for another reason, however, which makes them the subject of considerable study: they are a prime indicator of biodiversity. Any reduction in the number of species is an accurate indicator of the extent to which biodiversity is deteriorating, or becoming less important.

Certain groups are very well protected by the Bill. Clause 16 contains firm guarantees, stating:

> "Subject to the provisions of this section (and without prejudice to the general law concerning the application of statutes to the Duchy of Cornwall), nothing in this Act shall prejudice any of the rights, powers, privileges or authority attaching to the possessions of, or exercisable by, the possessor for the time being of the Duchy of Cornwall in relation to land belonging to the said Duchy and nothing in this Act shall apply to the said possessions or possessor by virtue of an interest in land belonging to the said Duchy without the consent specified in subsection (3) below."

There we have a copper-bottomed guarantee, which cannot possibly be breached, in favour of—whom? In favour of the person who received the income from the Duchy of Cornwall. We all know who that person is, and I do not want to break the rules of the House by identifying him. There is a strong case for saying that, given the extraordinary history of the land of the Duchy of Cornwall—the income from which now goes to just one person—that land actually belongs to the people of this country. Clause 16 gives an absolute guarantee that those rights will be protected.

The Bill goes on to say that certain other rights are protected. For instance, the protection of the trustees of the recreation ground of P. R. Blamey is enshrined in it. Clause 17 makes it clear that the commons and grounds of P. R. Blamey will be protected under what will become section 5, and there is no doubt that the draftsmen took the issues fully into account and were prepared to include the measure in the Bill. Why on earth will not the promoters agree to the modest request made by my hon.

[Mr. Flynn]

Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish during long meetings? Why are not the small concessions that, it has been suggested, will be forthcoming tonight included in the Bill? Why should we not be given a chance to prove tonight that they will be made? I am sure that we all consider such a development desirable.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I apologise for not being present during the first part of my hon. Friend's speech. I have read the Bill, however. May I make a plea? As the Bill is generally acceptable to the House, will my hon. Friend try to persuade the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks)—whom I respect—to establish whether an access agreement that is generally acceptable to the various parties could be negotiated? If that could be done, I think that the Bill could be passed in two minutes flat. That is a challenge; can the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall and others rise to it? Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the nub of the issue?

Mr. Flynn: I agree entirely. I am sure that many of us can think of other ways in which we could be using our time tonight. The Bill is important, but, as one who has not been involved in the negotiations, I sense that there is little space between the two sides.

It has been claimed that the Countryside Commission gave its blessing to the Bill, but in its most recent letter it expresses many serious misgivings. It speaks of a "strong preference": although it wants to continue to back the Bill, which deals with matters of some importance, it wants more attention to be given to public access, regarding that as one of the most important and accepted uses of Bodmin moor. In a letter to Cornwall county council, it says:

"We regret that it has not been possible for you to achieve a negotiated settlement of the petitioners' concerns."

Its position has always been that it wants the Bill to succeed—as we all do—and it believes that

"such a settlement would have assisted the passage of the Bill through Parliament."

I think that we would all agree with that.

Misgivings have also been expressed by the Ramblers Association, which represents a great many people. Its interests have not always been respected. The Country Landowners Association and the commoners have not always been friendly towards ramblers, and there is a continuous history going back to the beginning of the century—possibly beyond that—of ramblers having to fight for their rights of access against selfish landowners who have sought to restrict the access that we should all enjoy. The Ramblers Association has said that it believes that, if the Bill is passed, it could lead to a loss of access on the moors. That right of access should be enshrined in the Bill.

I do not know whether any of those who speak for the Bill's promoters are willing to grant us any extension, or any reaffirmation of what they are saying, or whether the matter must be left until the Committee stage—if that takes place in the near future. There is a suggestion, however, that the Bill goes against the long-held view that access to and management of common land should go hand in hand. That point was made in the 1958 report of the royal commission on common land, which we all remember so well. It was then endorsed by the Common Land Forum in its 1986 report, which was signed, and has long been supported, by interests including the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, the Association of County Councils, speaking with the support of Cornwall county council, and many others. The important point is that recreation and amenity organisations should support the two main principles. They should be part of the principles of the Common Land Forum and govern our use of the wonderful wild habitat in this countryside.

Bodmin moor has been preserved in its wild state while we have seen encroachments into other beautiful areas. It is the task of everyone in the House to ensure that the Bill does the best that it can for wild areas and the habitats of creatures, but there is no excuse for leaving out of the Bill the right of access to the moor for those with an interest in nature. The Bill could provide for that access to be regulated by the county council and others to protect the area sensibly, reasonably and practically. I urge the promoters to strengthen the right of access in the Bill.

8.58 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I understand the concerns that have been expressed in the House today about the lack of agreement over the right to access in the Bill. I have listened to much of the debate, and I have read about the Bill, and it seems to me that—in the preliminary planning stages of the Bill—all concerned intended to settle the issue of access for recreational purposes to Bodmin moor at the same time as the other elements of the Bill, such as common grazing rights and the establishment of the commoners council. We support those interesting measures, but if there is a reluctance to include a small clause about access on the face of the Bill, we must conclude that the promoters and some landowners are deeply reluctant to allow sensible access agreements for Bodmin moor.

I decided to speak in the debate partly because the day before yesterday I participated in a re-enactment of the 1932 Abbey Brook mass trespass over Strines moor in my constituency. As a result of that, and as a result of many years of pressure, access was gained to one right of way across the moor, but the land was owned by the Fitzwilliam estates on one side of the right of way and by the Broomhead estates on the other. When 40 people re-enacted the Abbey Brook event on Sunday, I was struck by the disadvantages of having not an open access agreement covering the whole moor but only an access agreement covering the rights of way.

Mr. Bennett: I went to the Library today and looked carefully at the areas covered by the moor. The problem is that few of the historic rights of way were recorded. Local people thought that they could go where they wanted on the moor and that they did not have to stick to paths. Unfortunately, because the paths were not recorded as rights of way, there is only de facto access. As the Bill is now worded, the commoners could stop that access. There is the example of the Arans where de facto access existed for years, but suddenly people were restricted to one or two paths.

Mrs. Jackson: It is a further cause for concern if the powers that the Bill could give to the commoners council could be used to restrict even further the rights of way of people over the existing paths and tracks over Bodmin

moor. If access is officially restricted to one or two paths and access is denied to the general moorland, that puts more pressure on those paths and tracks which could then be more open to the damage caused by four-wheel-drive vehicles. If there is general access, hikers and walkers will use the moor more for recreational purposes and they will constitute a strong lobby to prevent four-wheel-drive vehicles or other noisy activities from taking over and destroying the peaceful environment of the moor.

When we discussed in the Select Committee the countryside leisure activities and the environmental damage that they could do, one of the issues that was raised time and again was that most problems could be solved and a satisfactory way forward could be found by careful management and negotiation and by obtaining agreement from all the bodies concerned.

Mr. Bennett: I agree with my hon. Friend, but does she accept that it is important to increase the areas to which people have access so that the crowds are spread out? One of the things that came out of the inquiry was the advantage of making more and more areas available for people to walk over.

Mrs. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I well remember the evidence that we received in the peak district, which is a heavily used open area with many conurbations around it. It was crucial to maximise the area to which people had a right of access and to ensure that there was good negotiation about who should be allowed to undertake their various leisure, agricultural and community pursuits. When the various bodies work in harmony, it is invariably possible to achieve a satisfactory and well managed way forward.

Mr. Skinner: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend's last statement about getting all those people together. How on earth can one get together the Country Landowners Association, the farmers, the commoners and all the ordinary, run-of-the-mill people who demand a right of access? I have listened to the debate for the past hour and I think that what we have here is a classic case of market forces versus planning agreements. It looks to me as though we are not battling against something tiny: it is the old-fashioned battle between those with property and rights and the rest of the people who want access to this part of Bodmin moor. For the life of me, I cannot say that I am too keen on travelling there, but it is obvious that many others want to do so.

Mrs. Jackson: I suspect that there is some truth in my hon. Friend's point, but I also suspect that it is an oversimplification in this case. I was interested to read the letter from the Country Landowners Association suggesting that it is important to obtain environmentally sensitive area status for Bodmin moor—such status will be brought nearer by the Bill—partly because it

"would encourage the conditions in which further voluntary access agreements could be reached".

Mr. Skinner: I would like to believe that, but I have just been reading a letter from the Ramblers Association which says that we should not believe everything in the letter from the Country Landowners Association because it is full of misleading statements. We all know what the crack is in this place: the Government are at it every day, trying to gloss over what they are up to. I think that the letter from the Country Landowners Association needs to be read over and over again because it is a sprat to catch a mackerel—although not on Bodmin moor.

Mrs. Jackson: There is great deal of truth in what my hon. Friend says. Unless we have this agreement at this stage, before the Bill receives Royal Assent, we cannot guarantee that a small clique of landowners among the Common Land Forum will not put in place the restrictive measures which we have experienced over many years in the peak district in Yorkshire and Derbyshire.

Mr. Bennett: There is a suspicion that country landowners have a double function in this. We started off with agreement that there would be access, but between patches of common there are landowners' holdings, some of which are substantial. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned one. Landowners' interests are different from those of commoners. Landowners would like to have environmentally sensitive area status, but if commoners gain access to the commons, the logic is that they can gain access to the big landowners' land by the side of them. I suspect that that is where the country landowners, among others, started to change their attitude from supporting access to saying, "Hang on a minute—if we give access to the common, we shall have to give it on surrounding land."

Mrs. Jackson: I suspect that my hon. Friend may be right. I do not want to keep harking back to last Sunday, but on Strines moor in my constituency the large landowner, Fitzwilliam estates, which has owned that moor for generations and which has been so stubborn that it will not give an inch—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is about Bodmin moor, not the hon. Lady's constituency.

Mrs. Jackson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was just that larger landowners were mentioned and I was making a point about my experience of them and their possible intentions in relation to Bodmin moor.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend has mentioned large landowners. I think that she has studied clause 16, referring to allegedly the largest landowner in Cornwall: he owns the Duchy of Cornwall. My hon. Friend will notice that the Bill has the normal preamble referring to the Royal Assent that it will need. As we know, that is on all Bills. It is done in the name of Her Majesty, according to our unwritten constitution.

Mr. Skinner: What if the Queen does not give Royal Assent?

Mr. Flynn: Indeed. There might be unforeseen circumstances. But is there not a conflict of financial interest here? We have just had Lord Nolan's recommendation on declarations of financial interest. Is it inconceivable, as there is a family connection between the sovereign and the person who has the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was all very interesting, but it was a very long intervention.

Mrs. Jackson: That was an interesting intervention, but it perhaps stresses only my general point: the crux of the

[Mrs. Jackson]

issue is that, if a negotiated settlement about an access agreement were in the Bill, we would not be debating it at such length as all parties would be agreed.

I was especially interested in the letter on this issue from the Countryside Commission, which is financed with Government grants. Dated 10 February 1995, the letter said:

"We regret that it has not been possible for you to achieve a negotiated settlement of the petitioners' concerns. Our position has always been that we want this Bill to succeed"—

which the Opposition want as well—

"and we believe that such a settlement would have assisted the passage of the Bill through Parliament."

That is obviously true. If there had not been an attempt in the House of Lords to rule out the inclusion in the Bill of clear access provision, there would be no problem.

I am further concerned that there are not sufficient safeguards to ensure the establishment of rights of access for recreation through the commoners council. Clause 5 covers access to leisure but does not mention or specify rights of access of ramblers, walkers and people who want to enjoy the open countryside or go off the beaten track to enjoy the very special wildlife and vegetation that I am sure one can find on Bodmin moor.

Mr. Skinner: I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) talk about the council. When he was asked whether it was a quango, he said that it was not quite, but sort of. I want to know exactly how the council will be formed. Will people be nominated? Will there be a lot of patronage? Will there be wealthy people on it per se? Will some people be elected, and if so, will the elections be first past the post, the Liberal Democrats' proportional representation system, or what? My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, who is well versed in such matters, did not give the proper information. Can my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) shed any light on the matter?

Mrs. Jackson: My understanding is that the commoners council will comprise people who have an interest in grazing, farming or otherwise using parts of Bodmin moor. If the sponsors of the Bill have any further information, I am sure that they would want to explain the matter.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that the moor consists of parcels of land in what most people would call Bodmin moor, the physical area? For each parcel of land, selective groups of people have commoners' rights which go back to the middle ages. The intervening bits of land were taken away by the Enclosure Acts. Anybody who has a right to use the common for grazing—I think that there are other rights, but I am not absolutely certain—is entitled to elect representatives. One of the people who was complaining about the Bill explained to me that the process was not particularly democratic. I can understand the argument that one piece of land might have two representatives and another might have three and that, like parliamentary constituencies, it is very difficult to establish fairness between—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is an awfully interesting point, but the hon. Gentleman is taking a long time to explain it.

Mrs. Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). As what one might call the grazing industry reorganises itself, the commoners council could easily become one, two or at the most three people over a number of years. The same people might therefore be involved in different pockets of land and the crucial issue of access would again be determined by a very small number of people who have grazing interests on the common areas of Bodmin moor. That would concern us all.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Lady admit that there is a perfectly good footpath network throughout the moor? Is she merely rehearsing arguments for a wider right to roam over the whole of the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber while we have been discussing the paucity of rights of way over Bodmin moor that are shown on maps. The danger is that even the existing footpaths, which are few and far enough between, may be affected by the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: As I explained before the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) came into the Chamber, I looked at the Ordnance Survey maps of Bodmin moor in preparation for the debate and was disappointed to find few rights of way recorded. I counted 16 ancient monuments and other archaeological sites on the map, none of which was linked to a public footpath. As I asked earlier, how does one get permission to look at those sites if there is no one with the right to say that one can go there?

Mrs. Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), too, will be aware that ancient monuments in open country are rarely close to public footpaths. My father liked to look at archaeological remains, including those on Bodmin moor, and probably the first and last time that I went rambling in that area was as a fairly small child looking for archaeological sites. I do not remember their ever being close to public footpaths.

As we were saying earlier, such leisure activities are of interest only to a minority. There are not millions of people desperate to explore every archaeological site and trace of ancient history on Bodmin moor, or on any other moor. As has been argued through the ages, and certainly here today, an access agreement for areas of open country such as moorland or woodland—by no means across the whole country, as the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury suggested—would enable the relatively small number of people who want to indulge in such recreations, or to make academic studies, to do so without having to approach a rather nebulous body such as a commoners council, from which it might be difficult to get permission.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, the Opposition do not suggest that landowners and farmers are unreasonable people—perhaps one of us might, but my hon. Friend the

Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not suggesting any such thing at the moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish described how in his experience, if farmers are approached nicely for permission to walk across land and look at something that one finds interesting, there is usually no problem.

Mr. Bennett: I think that my hon. Friend will agree that most people who work with their hands are proud of their skills. Most working farmers are proud of the land that they till and look after, and they are pleased to let other people go on to it. The problem arises with some of the people who own land but never do a day's work on it. They often want to keep people out so that they can use the land occasionally for shooting or some other such activity.

Mrs. Jackson: I agree. I do not know whether that now happens on Bodmin moor, but to speed the progress of the legislation through the House, all we ask is that an access agreement be negotiated with all the parties so as to satisfy the petitioners from the Ramblers Association and the other organisations that have petitioned against the Bill. That is a small problem, and an easy one to solve. Once it has been solved, we can then allow this excellent Bill to go forward through the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. John Gunnell.

9.24 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has only just come in.

Mr. Gunnell: I was going to start by referring to that matter. I apologise to the House for being a late entrant to the Chamber for the debate, although I have watched some of it on the screen in my room. I have thus heard speeches from some of the hon. Members who are sitting near me now.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the arguments regarding hon. Members watching debates in their rooms is that no one would come into the Chamber? Does he agree—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must get on to the Bill.

Mr. Gunnell: My hon. Friend is correct. The availability of television broadcasts of the Chamber debates can have two effects. It can make Members lazy, but it can make people realise that an issue is important.

Mr. Skinner: There is nothing wrong with watching "Brookside" on the other channel.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are discussing the Bodmin Moor Commons Bill, and the hon. Gentleman should get back to that subject.

Mr. Gunnell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have not managed to get on to the Bill yet. My connection with Cornwall is as a tourist, and it is clear that tourism is an important aspect of the Cornish economy. Any members of Cornwall county council who are listening will accept that it is important that Cornwall gets its share of the tourist industry. As someone who is in favour of as much public access as possible, I thought it important to speak in the debate. That is my direct connection with Cornwall. I have no relatives in the area.

Tourists are interested in access, and some people will go to the moorlands because it gives them an opportunity to see a particular kind of habitat. They may, like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), have a particular interest in archaeological sites. But others want to visit Bodmin moor to get away from things. Those people's views are represented by various organisations, whose briefings I have read since I became interested in the Bill.

The interests of landowners and farmers are represented on one side, and the interests of ramblers on the other. The Countryside Commission seems to represent one side of the argument, but if one looks carefully at its letter, one realises that it is on the other side. The letter has been referred to in the debate, and it is not necessary to quote from it again.

The Country Landowners Association and the farmers obviously have legitimate interests in the land, but they are not the only people with an interest. Judging by the words and works of the Countryside Commission, access to the countryside and to this particular stretch of countryside is important to people. I submit that it is also an important aspect of tourism. Most people go to Cornwall to visit the coast. The coastline is an area of outstanding natural beauty, but many also welcome the opportunity of a mixed holiday that enables them to visit the moor.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that the coastal paths in Cornwall are extremely attractive but very popular? Many people go to the countryside for peace and quiet and to look at wildlife. One does not see much wildlife when there are hordes of people. The attraction of Bodmin moor is that there are far fewer people there. So, if one wants a balanced holiday, it is good to spend some time on the moor, if one gets good weather, and some time on the coastal footpath.

Mr. Gunnell: I entirely agree. I come from Yorkshire and my family home is near open countryside, so I appreciate being able to walk there. I am sure that Mr. Deputy Speaker has the same view of access to the countryside in Yorkshire as is being presented—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I welcome walking on Bodmin moor, which is what we are talking about.

Mr. Gunnell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is important none the less to point out that the way in which we view the matter depends to some extent on our upbringing.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we come from Yorkshire, we understand that boggy moors have attractions, contrary to some of the sedentary comments that I have heard? Moors that may on the face of it seem boggy have significant attractions and a wealth of wildlife and interest.

Mr. Gunnell: That is correct and there are people who study particular habitats and who will particularly want to

[Mr. Gunnell]

see the type of habitat available on the moor—to see the flora and creatures that live there—which is of particular interest to them.

Mr. Skinner: While my hon. Friend is discussing the Bill, he should bear in mind that he represents a chunk of a city. I sometimes get the impression that city people lord it over people who live in rural areas. I was born and bred in a rural area—in most of the mining areas, the pit villages are surrounded by loads of fields, as Mr. Deputy Speaker will know—so I know. One of the problems that we always face with such Bills is that we can give the impression that people from the city somehow know best.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying hard, but I doubt whether there are any coal mines on Bodmin moor.

Mr. Gunnell: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is correct.

The availability of open countryside is extremely important to my constituents, who are very concerned because their open land is being spoiled by opencast mining. Six opencast sites have been agreed in my constituency, but I can see that I am making you restless, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend is too modest to mention the fact that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) are distinguished photographers and need access to beautiful sites to take the sort of wonderful photographs that are now on exhibition in Bradford. Perhaps my hon. Friend can tell us how access is important to him to take those wonderful pictures.

Mr. Gunnell: That is true. The law in many other countries allows better access than does ours and would not let a collaboration of landowners and farmers—and many people belong to organisations of both and so have two votes, so to speak—to cut off public access.

I think of the years that I spent in the United States, which I may say to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) were important to me for taking the photographs that he mentioned. I spent time in the national parks there. Access to them in the United States is different from that which we are discussing. It is almost open access. One cannot advertise in such areas. People have the freedom to go where they want, which is limited only by national park rangers who can decide whether an area is unsafe because of—

Mr. Skinner: Guns?

Mr. Gunnell: It is not because of guns. No guns are permitted.

Mr. Skinner: What, in America?

Mr. Gunnell: Guns are permitted in America but not in national parks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is testing my patience. We are debating the Bodmin Moor Commons Bill. He must confine his remarks to its contents. If he does not, I shall have to ask him to take his seat.

Mr. Gunnell: I was brought up in Birmingham, so I am fortunate that my interest in the countryside was stimulated when I was an evacuee during the war when my aunt used to take me into the country.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I have walked regularly on Bodmin moor with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and I have a great love for it. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Labour party will never be forgiven in Cornwall for its disgraceful tactics in trying to talk out and destroy this important Bill? He should remember what he is doing to the Labour party's reputation in Cornwall.

Mr. Gunnell: I am given to understand that I have been in the Chamber for longer than the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff). I have apologised to the House for not having been able to be here at the start of the debate.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that our whole argument is that if the Bill's promoters give us an access agreement, they can have the Bill quickly? The people in Cornwall who want regulation must accept a balance between control of the moor and control of access to it. It is they who are delaying the Bill. We will have petitions and arguments on Report. Give us the access agreement and get on with it.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank my hon. Friend for making that clear. The Bill's position on access is more restrictive than hon. Members have been led to believe. Some clauses have been taken out from the Bill as originally drafted. A Bill that it was thought would give access to the public for rambling has been reduced.

Mr. Morley: I do not think that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) was here at the start of the debate or he would have heard that the Opposition support the principle of the Bill. He knows that concern has been expressed on both sides of the House about access.

Mr. Gunnell: When a tourist visitor intervenes in a measure that is specifically geared to an area, he enters a controversy. I should say why I am prepared to speak tonight. It is because I believe that public access is very important.

I believe that that issue has not yet been determined. Many people would share the view of hon. Members like myself, who have spoken in the debate, that access to that land should be as open as possible, and that at the moment the proposals in the Bill are too restrictive. As I understand it, it is also agreed that Cornwall county council did consider the issue of more open access.

Mr. Skinner: It should be placed on the record—I ask my hon. Friend to comment—that, earlier in the debate, the Tory hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made a speech opposing the proposals in the Bill, and other Back Benchers have done the same.

What I am saying has nothing to do with the Labour party's position. Some of us, having read the Ramblers Association document, have taken the view that it has made a strong case, and the Ramblers Association has people in every constituency, including Worcester.

We are not here to try to prevent someone getting decent rights; we are here to ensure that everyone gets rights, and by a small amendment and an access agreement we can get satisfaction for everyone. Let us make it absolutely clear that that is what the business is about tonight.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank my hon. Friend for describing the position so clearly. I had recognised that to be the position. There is no intention of preventing the Bill's passage entirely. It is recognised that there is much in it of value. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] No; I will not. I understand that, in order for that to happen, and in order for both parties to be satisfied—especially those who want a greater degree of access—there must be further discussion. There must be a proper—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I must say that he is getting very near to tedious repetition. I have heard it time and again, so we are getting pretty nearly there.

Mr. Gunnell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I certainly would not want to be guilty of repetition of the type that you have described. Admittedly, only one important issue in the Bill concerns Members, so there is a certain amount of repetitiveness in what hon. Members are saying. They are saying that, currently, access is too limited and in the control of too few people.

It is uncertain how many people serve on the commoners council, how they get there, and who determines how long they keep their places; so one does not know whether the matter will ever be reopened if the Bill passes as it is structured. We do not know whether the opportunity for public access that people strongly feel is necessary, and which many people feel is necessary, will be available if we allow the Bill to pass in its current form. There is no intention, as I understand it—

Mr. Skinner: Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that, if he had heard—he probably did hear part of it on the teleprompter or whatever—the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), he would have known that he, with all his views and knowledge about rambling, felt that we were close to an agreement? We are talking about something that will last for a terribly long time, and it is important that we get it right. It is well known that, in private Bill procedure in the House of Commons, the way to get things done properly is to hold the Bill up and have further discussions. There are countless examples of private Bills that have emerged better as a result of long discussions and the chance to get people round a table again.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank my hon. Friend for explaining that, as the hon. Member for Worcester may agree, the process in which we are engaged is not obstructive but constructive. To make possible the constructive dialogue that I believe will follow tonight's debate, there must be the necessity for it, and that necessity will be found only if the Bill as it stands is not accepted by the House. There will follow negotiations that will result, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said, in a better Bill.

I think it right to play my part in such a cause. Access is important and should be determined democratically. It may be argued that Cornwall county council is a democratic body. I used to be the leader of West Yorkshire council. I dare say it was not our countryside policy that led to our abolition; that resulted, rather, from our radical view on certain other matters—notably public transport. The Peaks park, a national park, was part of our area. We believed in providing access to the public—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman continues to test my patience. We are talking not about west Yorkshire but about Bodmin moor. I would be obliged if he confined his remarks to the latter. I do not want to have to interrupt again.

Mr. Gunnell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This Bill is but one of many such Bills. The restrictions placed on access to Bodmin may reverberate around the country in the form of other private Bills—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That may be so, but we are still debating the Bodmin Moor Commons Bill.

Mr. Gunnell: I might just add—

Mr. Bennett: Some of the local bodies say that they do not want a local agreement—there must be a national agreement. But national bodies such as the Country Landowners Association and the NFU say that they do not want a national agreement—agreements must be reached case by case. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the problem? Does not his west Yorkshire experience show that in this case we have to go for local negotiations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already made my ruling. I am fully aware of the hon. Gentleman's familiarity with west Yorkshire; I just wish he understood this Bill a little better.

Mr. Gunnell: I shall speak just a little longer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and will give you no cause to tell me to be quiet again.

I believe it possible to reach a local agreement if the Bill in its current form is rejected. I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would understand that if the land concerned were on your doorstep.

Mr. Hicks: While the hon. Gentleman was watching his television monitor in his office, he may have missed the reference to assurances that have been given by Cornwall county council, the promoter of the Bill. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) confirmed earlier that, following discussion, the county council has agreed to seek a voluntary access agreement with the landowners and commoners of Bodmin moor commons. Furthermore, the county council, as of today's date, is setting the necessary machinery in motion forthwith. That is precisely what Opposition Members have been asking for during this debate, especially during the past hour or so. The positive dialogue for which the hon. Gentleman has called will be denied, as will access agreements, if the Bill fails to obtain a Second Reading this evening.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must reply to the intervention.

Mr. Gunnell: I was about to do so. There is a great difference between a provision appearing on the face of

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the Bill and a commitment that an issue will be addressed in future. I have served on a number of Standing Committees in which hon. Members raised important matters that were not mentioned in the Bill concerned. Ministers were sympathetic and suggested that those issues could be dealt with later. In practice, however, it is rare that those issues are addressed.

It is important that certain issues appear on the face of the Bill. I hope that the discussions that I believe will take place will make the Bill more positive. I am also concerned about the cost to the county council of promoting the Bill.

Mr. Tyler: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman could contemplate the consequences if the Bill does not get its Second Reading here in the House. There will then be no discussion and no access agreement on Bodmin moor. If the hon. Gentleman had been here earlier, he would know that I am a regular walker on Bodmin moor. If there is no Second Reading, there will be no discussion and no access agreement.

Mr. Gunnell: I would be surprised if the county council wanted the Bill to fall.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that one or two of us have dealt with many private Bills in the past—sadly, too many? We all know that if the Bill does not complete its Second Reading tonight, it can be scheduled for Second Reading on another day. If it is unopposed, it will go through on the nod at 2.30 pm. If we can achieve an agreement, the whole process will be extremely quick.

Mr. Gunnell: I am aware that my hon. Friend has worked on a number of private Bills in order to improve them from the public perspective. I know that he has been successful in a number of cases.

I assume that Cornwall county council is not prepared to bury its head in the sand. Promoting a Bill costs a considerable amount of money as I am well aware, having taken the Leeds Supertram Act 1993 through the House. I took over the responsibility for that measure from my predecessor, now Lord Merlyn-Rees.

I recognise the there are important costs associated with promoting such a Bill. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made it absolutely clear that the matter can be corrected in a very simple manner, provided that there is access. As there was access when the Bill was originally conceived, it would seem to me that Cornwall county council does not wish to stop access to Bodmin moor. I accept from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that there is a degree of access already, but that access appears to be put at risk by the framework of the Bill. As do not know the constitution of the body on which it depends, we do not know how the matter will be handled. I accept that Cornwall county council has put the Bill before us with the best of intentions. It is not the intention of hon. Members to thwart that Bill and to make it spend the money again.

We intend to put in place a satisfactory access agreement. I understand that the present agreement is in the hands of people to whom the House, and perhaps Cornwall county council, cannot dictate. Therefore, it is important that proper access provisions should appear on the face of the Bill. We should participate in a constructive process and reach an agreement that makes good sense to the local people and to the tourists who visit Cornwall.

In my contribution tonight, I have tried to keep closely to the remit of Bodmin moor as we are considering a private Bill. I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber recognise the issue on which the debate is based. I am anxious that there should be legislation that allows people appropriate access to the moor and that those provisions should appear on the face of the Bill. We should not allow another body to determine that when we do not know what its intentions might be. Perhaps it would limit access and the hon. Member for North Cornwall would not be able to continue his walks across the moor.

Therefore, I do not believe that I have been part of an obstructive process. As a consequence of our debating the legislation tonight, the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) has a distinguished record in this area—and I have been unable to attend a cricket dinner.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that the Labour party is involved in a filibuster in order to prevent the Bill's Second Reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair will decide what is in order in the House.

Mr. Gunnell: This will be the last time that I stand up as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I have made my point clearly: I do not regard this process as obstructive. I do not believe that it is inimical to the interests of the county council which represents the people of Cornwall and is responsible for the local economy. Perhaps we have upset certain country landowners and some farmers who believe that their land should be inviolate. I believe that we should spell out what sort of access is permissible.

9.57 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is important to remember that, apart from the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) who spoke in support of the Bill, one of the main contributions to the debate came from the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). We may not agree about some issues, but tonight he made it abundantly clear that he opposed the Bill in principle because it is not good enough. It is not a party political issue. Another major contribution to the debate came from my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). Hon. Members who have been here for some time know that my hon. Friend understands the British countryside better than anyone.

Mr. Hicks *rose in his place, and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 108, Noes 19.

Division No. 130] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bates, Michael
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Tony
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pearson, Ian
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Richards, Rod
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Bayley, Hugh
Bennett, Andrew F
Callaghan, Jim
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Flynn, Paul
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Terry Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put accordingly, and agreed to.*

Bill read a Second time, and committed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Defamation Bill *[Lords]*, the Police Bill *[Lords]*, the Industrial Tribunals Bill *[Lords]* and the Employment Rights Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Defamation Bill *[Lords]*

Postponed proceeding on Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *resumed.*

10.9 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile: I am pleased that, after that ramble across Bodmin moor, during which the beast of Bolsover was temporarily transmogrified into the beast of Bodmin, I can resume the speech that was interrupted at 7 o'clock. At that time, if my memory serves, I was talking about clause 14 and the Hoffmann amendment. Lord Hoffmann himself did not vote for his amendment and I suggest that it went further than is necessary to achieve the end desired by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) in his defamation action against *The Guardian* and by any other hon. Members who might find themselves in a similar position because of parliamentary privilege.

I suggest that there is an alternative way to deal with the problem, which would not have the effect of handing over decisions on privilege from the House itself to individual Members of the House. The Hoffmann amendment should be altered in due course so that the decision-making power on the waiving of privilege would be held by the Committee dealing with privilege in each House of Parliament.

I propose to make some comments on other clauses, and I would be grateful for the Parliamentary Secretary's observations, either tonight or in due course. Clauses 5 and 6 deal with time limits and we have heard several submissions to the House on that subject, including one from the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) who, as we have discovered, is the in-House expert in such matters. He said that a 12-month time limit may be too short—I respectfully agree—and he gave the good example of a potential plaintiff who has to await the end of police disciplinary proceedings. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman would agree that if we consider the law on the extension of time for the service of writs in personal injury actions, we see that the law can be unpredictable. It would be far better to have a clear statutory definition of the time limit, but it should be longer than one year.

In any event, if the time limit is reduced to one year, it will create an anomaly between the law of England and Wales and the law of Scotland. I am glad to see that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) in his place because he has experience of such matters. I am advised that the time limit in Scotland remains three years. If the time limit in Scotland is three years and the limit in England and Wales is one year, that is likely to lead to what is nowadays called forum shopping in cases in which proceedings are not brought timeously in England and Wales, or in Northern Ireland, to which the one-year limit would also apply.

These days, most publication is UK-wide, although generally the burden of publication is in one of the jurisdictions. Although private international law addresses some of the problems that might arise, it does not meet them all. I am told that the doomsday scenario among Scottish lawyers—but I find it hard to believe that Scottish lawyers are reluctant to earn any fees that might result—is that libel lawyers in London might use the Scottish courts as a forum in which to start proceedings that would otherwise be time-barred. It would make us look rather foolish if cases could be brought in Scotland on the same facts in the same publication after a time bar had run out in England. The case for a shared time bar must be strong.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): My hon. and learned Friend is making a good fist of understanding Scots law. Perhaps he has in mind some forum shopping after the next election, or the one after that. Has my hon. and learned Friend turned his mind to the inhibition that the present law places on attacking the character of the plaintiff? That inhibition, from which certain prominent individuals have obviously profited in the past, is to be removed by the Bill, but it will remain in Scotland. Has my hon. and learned Friend given any consideration to the anomaly that will arise if those two different systems stand side by side?

Mr. Carlile: I have, and I will deal with it in my next point but one. My hon. and learned Friend suggested that I might be interested in the odd wee briefie in Scotland. The answer is, of course, any time that I am free. Perhaps he would like to have a word with his clerk.

Clause 8 deals with the summary procedure. I am concerned that the damages limit of £10,000 is much too low. A point was made earlier about the money that newspapers make from sensational stories—and no doubt they do. What is more, there is no doubt that newspapers calculate the effect on their circulation of publishing a sensational story which may have risks attached to it. They are prepared to pay not very reliable witnesses sums far in excess of £10,000 just to be able to quote them, and photograph them for the story.

The damages payable under a summary procedure, which we do need, should be proportionate to the sums that the newspapers can make from the stories. If we do not do that, newspapers will make £50,000 or £60,000 clear profit from the story, which they will have assessed with great and cynical care. Paying £10,000 to the poor person who has been libelled will pale into insignificance and will go down as a small business expense.

Those who have been libelled, and there are quite a number in the House now, including one or two who share this Bench with me—they will go to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough for advice next time—would share the view that it is important that newspapers should not be able to see libel as a profitable business to be indulged in at will.

I want to make a point about clause 8, and clause 9, which is associated with it. It has been put to me by an entirely partial organisation—the Fleet Street Lawyers Society—but it has expressed it well and may be on to something. In clause 9(2) there appears to be a provision which will enable a judge to draft an apology and direct that those words should appear in a particular form and in a particular place in a newspaper. I am all in favour of newspapers being called to account when they defame—

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Except in my case.

Mr. Carlile: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening earlier, he would have heard me make it clear that I support his wish to have his case tried. Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene? Many hon. Members would like to see the hon. Gentleman's case tried, and I am one of them.

My point is that clause 9(2) creates a new spectre for the press which is the drafting and placing in newspapers of certain forms of statement by judges. That may be one step too far against the freedom of the press. There are certain circumstances in which the adage, "Publish and be damned" has some validity. The House should hesitate before it goes down the road of judge-drafted apologies, placed in a form directed by the judge and in a place in a newspaper directed by the judge. No doubt, we shall return to that discussion.

Evidence of convictions and character was raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East. It is dealt with in clauses 12 and 13. Clause 13 plainly gives newspapers the opportunity to rake up dirt about employment that was not known at the time of the defamation and that was sought only after an action was started. I have been involved professionally not in defamation cases, but in other cases where expensive private investigators have been sent to rake up dirt on people. The way in which they do so is extremely intrusive. We heard some illustrations earlier. They usually start with the dustbins and go downwards from there. We should hesitate before permitting such activity to take place.

Furthermore, as my hon. and learned Friend intimated, we may allow that to happen in England, but the law of Scotland will remain different. The rule in Scott *v.* Sampson will continue to be in force in Scotland, whereas it will be abolished in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The present law in Scotland allows a dishonest pursuer, as they call him there, or plaintiff, as we call him here, to protect his reputation in court. The judge or jury is not entitled to know that, in truth, he is a dishonest person or a person of bad character. The defence is not allowed to introduce evidence to that effect. The likes of, let us say, the late Robert Maxwell have made much use of those provisions to conceal their true character from the courts.

The Bill permits a disparity between England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Scotland. That will encourage forum shopping because, plainly, plaintiffs who feel vulnerable as to their character will start their action, if they possibly can, in Scotland. What is more, as I understand it, in Scotland, they would be able to insist on a jury trial. I see my hon. and learned Friend shaking his head. I ask him to sort that one out with the Scottish Media Lawyers Society when he is next in Edinburgh. There is, however, an anomaly between English and Scottish law. I urge the Minister to resolve it before the Bill is finalised.

Apart from clause 14, which causes great anxiety, and about which the House has heard from me and other hon. Members, the Bill is useful and can be turned into a tidying-up and reform of the law of defamation. That will make it simpler and give more people access to the courts, although still leaving many way outside the financial prospect of bringing an action for libel or slander.

I hope that we shall be permitted to have a full debate on the Hoffmann amendment on the Floor of the House, that we will be able to offer alternatives for debate by the House and that it will not, in any sense, be a whipped debate. There are fairly ugly rumours and suspicions that, in the House of Lords, there was an unofficial whip on the Hoffmann amendment—certainly a great deal of encouragement—and that the neutrality that the Government contend that there was, was somewhat artificial. If that is so, I hope that we will not have a repeat performance when the House considers the matter during later proceedings on the Bill.

3.23 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): In a House that, as usual, seems to be stuffed with members of the legal profession, it is slightly intimidating for a lay person such as myself to contribute to the debate. I feel already their blood rising when they see someone standing not exactly in the box, but in a sort of court; they are waiting just to get their teeth into what I am about to say.

I want to say only three things. One is about the plaintiff being given a proper right of reply should they be libelled. Clause 2(4) mentions an opportunity to do that in an offer to make amends. Will the Minister consider building into the Bill a provision that, when newspapers make an apology, as they sometimes offer to do when settling out of court, they should have to make it as prominent as the original libel, and—possibly—reproduce in its entirety the apology that they made in court?

In my experience, newspapers usually fillet the large slice of humble pie that they have had to eat. It is reduced to a relatively small piece of pie that they tend to poke away in some obscure part of the newspaper. That is extremely annoying to the person who has been libelled. They do not feel that they have had a fair showing in the paper.

A line in a popular song says, "It ain't what you do do, it's more what you don't do." My second point is that the Bill don't do justice to the fact that newspapers can offset all their costs in actions, whereas plaintiffs have to pay out of their net income. That is totally wrong. Newspapers offset not only their legal costs and VAT, but are often insured—partly at least—against the award that may be made against them. Although it is not the place of my hon. Friend the Minister, the Bill's tax implications should be seriously considered.

An individual, not the newspaper as an institution, should be held responsible for the libel. There is something to be said for newspaper editors being held partially liable. Unless they are hit in their own pockets, they will not have any incentive to act otherwise—not even to make their own staff check the details of what they are about to print. We all know that stories go to print without the person whom they are about to traduce being contacted.

The third thing missing in the Bill, not surprisingly, is any reference to the gouging fees that the legal profession charges people who have to go to court to defend themselves. I admit that, on occasions, some of my hon. Friends have assisted me. Lord Williams said that he did not support an amendment to the Bill in another place on the basis that scales are often uneven in defamation cases—which is absolutely true—where the plaintiff is a private person who cannot get legal aid and the defendant is often a wealthy corporation.

I would love it if we could incorporate something in the Bill to address the fact that plaintiffs who cannot get legal aid can hardly find a barrister to do the job for less than £300 or £400 an hour. In fact, silks charge about £1,000 an hour, which is simply appalling. *[Interruption.]* That is certainly the case in London libel courts.

In Committee—where I very much hope that I shall have the opportunity to speak—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear it in mind that we should be trying

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

to establish a level playing field on both sides of a libel action. At the moment, the scales are loaded in favour of newspapers, which is why there is so much discontent about how defamation laws in this country work. In Committee, we must try to strike a balance.

10.28 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I have only two points to make. I am neither a lawyer nor a Member with a grievance, which makes me a distinct minority among those who have spoken in the debate. But what I am is a Member of Parliament—one who has an interest in how Parliament has developed, and how it has attempted to claim its rights over the years.

As a Member of Parliament, I view with some alarm the casual way in which, into an otherwise perfectly benign, uncontroversial, helpful Bill, has been slipped an amendment that would have the effect of striking out a fundamental of our constitution. That may seem rather an extravagant thing to say to a thin Tuesday night House on the day before we rise for the recess, but I am afraid that that is what we are talking about, and I hope that the House will understand it.

Many of us will say that we have genuine sympathy with the hon. Members who find themselves in the predicaments that we have heard about, and that we want to do something to help them, but we live in an environment in which privilege has been claimed for proceedings here, and we would be ill advised to trespass on that arrangement unless we had given the whole idea the most careful consideration and knew precisely what we were doing.

In an earlier intervention, the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said that if we did as is suggested we would simply be "closing a loophole". Actually, we would be altering the Bill of Rights of 1688. That is the "loophole" that we would be closing. I know that it may be a bit old-fashioned, but it is worth reminding ourselves what the Bill of Rights says:

> "Freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament".

On the whole, that formulation has served the House rather well for 300 years. It is rather sharp and acute, and has a point to it. Above all, it has kept Parliament and the courts out of the conflicts that have bedevilled political systems all over the world. Each has known its place, because ever since 1688 privilege has been enshrined in that clause of the Bill of Rights.

When amendments are introduced late in the day to deal, so it is believed, with particular court cases of the moment by allowing hon. Members a waiver of privilege, as though that were a matter affecting no one but the individual hon. Member concerned, whatever our sympathies with such individuals, many of us will say, "I am afraid that things are just not like that." The matter of privilege is just not like that.

It is not possible for individual Members of Parliament to claim waivers of privilege, because privilege belongs to the House of Commons itself, and it is there for a reason. We hold privilege not so much for ourselves but on behalf of the people, who have set up a system of democratic representation and given us certain rights of privilege to speak on their behalf.

We have to exercise that right responsibly. I could stand here and say the most outrageous things, about the chairman of my constituency party—

Mr. Boateng: Surely not.

Dr. Wright:—or about the editor of *The Times*, and sometimes I feel provoked to do both. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Of course, the first part of that sentence should immediately be deleted from the record.

The right of privilege is there for a reason, and the obligation that goes with it is to use it responsibly.

On the other side, we know that journalists have treated politicians with magnificent contempt not only in latter days but for hundreds of years. They have lampooned them, traduced them, defamed them and done all kinds of monstrous things to them. Despite the predicaments in which some hon. Members find themselves, all that was far worse in the past than it is today.

But in all that time—even when a daily columnist has suggested that an hon. Member does not possess his own hair—it has never been suggested that we should rush to the courts because of such treatment. Such matters are too important for that. Matters of privilege are embedded in how the House works.

This is not the time to rehearse the arguments and anxieties expressed in another place and by hon. Members about some of the implications of the Bill. I want to focus simply and briefly on a fundamental point. Only Parliament itself could waive a privilege that belongs to it on behalf of the people. An individual hon. Member could not waive it because that would undercut the purpose of privilege itself. It might be possible to introduce a mechanism so that Parliament could find a way of allowing individuals to waive privilege, but that would require a special procedure. We are in deep and dangerous territory, and casual amendments to Bills are not the solution.

I end with my second point, which is a procedural one. We are told that Lord Hoffmann tabled the amendment in the other place only so that it could be discussed and debated. As we have heard, he did not feel that he could vote for it. In addition, the Minister said earlier that he wanted only to have the matter debated. The problem is that Parliament does not have the mechanism to enable that immensely important constitutional debate to take place. With great respect to those hon. Members who will serve on it, such a debate will not take place in Committee. It will not take place on Report, although we have been promised some discussion and a vote later. Our discussion will not be informed by the extensive, expert and critical scrutiny that an amendment or a derogation from the Bill of Rights warrants. Such an amendment would require a Committee of Privileges to pronounce on it, and would certainly require a Joint Committee, as proposed by hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), to consider it.

The real problem is that when Parliament wants to consider such matters, it does not have the mechanism to do so. I speak as someone who favours constitutional change—I am not conservative in these matters. In wanting to make constitutional change, however, we must not make change as Parliament tends to—on the hoof and without thought, storing up problems for the future.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. Gentleman's party is committed to a great deal of constitutional change. Is he

suggesting that the House is incapable of dealing with such constitutional change and that it would have to refer it to special Committees?

Dr. Wright: The Minister's intervention invites me to go further than I intended, but I shall resist that temptation. I shall say simply that the fact that we have no special procedure to deal with constitutional matters, and instead treat them as though they were ordinary laws, is the source of many of our problems and discontents.

The time has come to try to develop the mechanisms and machinery that would enable us to deal with the Bill and all the other things that we propose. Personally, I would favour a constitutional commission—analogous to the Law Commission—to which such matters could be referred and which could produce expert and authoritative advice for the House. The way in which this change is being made is precisely the way in which it should not be done. We should not proceed casually and in a hurry without the reflection and expertise that is required.

We have had a golden rule governing the relationship between Parliament and the courts for 300 years. It has been enshrined in the article of the Bill of the Rights to which I have referred. In so far as we have anything resembling a written constitution, that article of the Bill of Rights is an important component of it. I do not believe that, on reflection, the House would want to sweep all that aside without consideration on the back of a Bill that is really about something else.

10.40 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I shall intervene in the debate for about 60 seconds. On Report, we may be able to go into clause 14 and, in Committee, I hope that I will not have to draw on my personal experience of libel and defamation, but I must repeat the notice that I gave my hon. Friend the Minister about the judgment in Northern Ireland in the case involving *The Daily Telegraph*.

I am glad that paragraph 12(2) of schedule 1 states:

"In this paragraph a 'public meeting' means a meeting bona fide and lawfully held for a lawful purpose and for the furtherance or discussion of a matter of public concern, whether admission to the meeting is general or restricted."

This is not a criticism of the judge, but it is incredible that a press conference—with members of the press invited to give more publicity to an issue—could have been determined in any court in any part of the United Kingdom as not being a public meeting.

I have no interests as a long-term reader of *The Daily Telegraph*, but it should be disqualified from trying to argue that it had qualified privilege, subject to explanation or contradiction, in reporting what was said at the press conference. I hope that that can be overturned on appeal, but I certainly believe that that part of the schedule should be sufficient to ensure that a newspaper trying to do its duty in sharing honestly expressed views with the public is able to do so without being liable to being left without any defence if the matter becomes the subject of a libel case.

10.41 pm

Mr. Boateng: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have had an important debate, albeit it one that was interrupted by other matters. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) made contributions which underlined the importance of the deliberations that the House is about to engage upon in relation to article 9 of the Bill of Rights, as did other hon. Members. I am concerned that the Government clearly do not intend to accede to any provisions by which it might be possible to give that important constitutional issue the airing and deliberation that the Opposition believe that it deserves.

Clearly, the Government are not prepared to accede to the motion for a Joint Committee of both Houses. If that is not to be the case, I urge them at this late stage to consider whether dealing with the matter on Report is the most satisfactory way to proceed, particularly when they have the option of splitting consideration of the Bill hereafter between a Committee of the whole House, on the Floor of the House—to consider clause 14 and debate it at length, with the opportunity for amendment—and a Standing Committee to deal with the remainder of the Bill. That at least would give an opportunity for the full and considered debate that this important issue deserves and would not cause those who take note of our proceedings to believe that we treated it with anything other than the seriousness that it deserves.

Whatever some Conservative Members have said, we are talking about a major constitutional change, and it should not be dealt with in the way that the Government propose. Even at this late stage, I ask the Minister and his colleagues to think again.

10.43 pm

Mr. Jonathan Evans: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. This has been an excellent debate and, in a way, we have managed to focus the attention of the House on those aspects of the Bill that are likely to lead to further debate in Committee and on Report.

A number of contributions have been made—by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile)—about the position regarding the limitation period. The Government have always said that the limitation period should also be subject to the operation of the discretion that is attached thereto. I do not want go into the detail now, but many of the concerns ventilated in the debate will be addressed by that. I look forward to developing those arguments in Committee.

The ruling on Scott *v.* Sampson and the Bill's proposals on that—and the way in which it impinges on the Scottish situation—were also of great interest. I hope that those concerns are addressed by the limitations attached to the relevant clause. Again, because of the wide concern that has been expressed in the debate, I hope that we can deal with the matter in more detail in Committee.

Finally, I must deal with some of the points on clause 14. I must correct the impression that it was added as a side wind, as it was described. It was introduced by Lord Hoffmann in the House of Lords. In Committee, the Lord Chancellor said that he did not think it appropriate that a vote should be taken because there had not been enough time to debate the issue at length. It was then debated yet again on Report. That was an excellent and very full

[Mr. Jonathan Evans]

debate. People who have read the report of that debate—I know that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery agrees—know that it was a wide-ranging debate with excellent contributions from people with wide experience. In my opening remarks, I said that that debate would be helpful to hon. Members. I hope that all hon. Members will have had the opportunity of having read it when we discuss the matter on Report.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman has not dealt with the view of the majority of those who spoke on Third Reading in the Lords that the matter should be considered by a Joint Committee of both Houses. He has had ample opportunity to consider that proposal. If the Government have decided against it, does he not have the responsibility to tell us why? It is not a matter that should be dealt with by a deafening silence. Why will the Government not agree to its being considered in a Joint Committee?

Mr. Evans: Again, I turn to the suggestion that I made in my opening statement that the report of the Lords Third Reading debate should be read by hon. Members. They would see that the Lord Chancellor made it clear that there were two options: the matter could have been referred to a Joint Committee or it could be dealt with then, with a similar vote being taken in this House, and that is the course of action that was taken.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

POLICE BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Streeter.*]

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNALS BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Streeter.*]

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Streeter.*]

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 5th June, Standing Orders Nos. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) and 15 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Community Care (Scottish Borders)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10.49 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to rehearse some of the fears and anxieties felt in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) about the consequences of the budgetary constraints facing the new unitary authority in the provision of community care in the borders.

I do not wish to waste valuable time tonight in detailed castigations of central Government for causing that problem, although it would be easy to do so. Opposition Members often resort to blaming the Government for how we got here. I do not care to rehearse those problems tonight.

I start by placing on the record the difficulties facing the local authority as a result of the fact that the 1996-97 financial settlement required the social work committee of the new unitary Scottish Borders council to reduce its social work budget by 9 per cent. in the current financial year.

For the purposes of tonight's argument, it does not matter how we arrived at the situation or who is to blame. Recrimination will not help us to make the best progress we can. I am anxious to confront the future, consider the problems that confront the local authority, and discover what can be done, in partnership with central Government, to try to solve some of the problems.

I should be misleading the House if I did not say that I was deeply anxious and troubled by the position that is unfolding locally. I shall use the time available to me to ask the Government whether they will consider undertaking a fundamental and thorough review of the current system of finance for community care, not only in south-east Scotland and the Borders region but throughout Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Scottish Borders council is now being forced to save about £240,000—nearly a quarter of a million pounds—from this year's general care budget of £3.7 million. It is being forced to make that saving in 12 months, and as a result must take decisions that mete out an extreme form of rough justice—especially, in the first instance, on the home care assistants, who are being made to bear the brunt of the cuts, which are being made in a rush.

Having spent some time studying the local authority's position, I support the principles behind the decisions that the council is taking, because they are obviously the least worst option. I have been persuaded by the social work department that any other attempt to make savings of that magnitude in the required time scale would have required a significant reduction in the hours of care available to clients, which is in no one's interests and must be avoided at all costs.

The measures are being forced on the council in an unduly short period, with indecent haste. People throughout the Borders feel great distress and concern. No one opposes sensible attempts to obtain value for money, but the scale of the savings that must be made in such a hopelessly short period has forced the council to reassess all its existing clients and determine whether current levels of care were appropriate to their current needs, and whether they could survive with less care. That in itself is a difficult process.

Secondly, the council is considering a pilot project to externalise a significant proportion of the in-house services provided in home care. That will effectively create, for the first time, a two-tier system of pay for home care assistants—comprising care tasks, which involve personal duties such as bathing people; and domestic tasks, which involve lighting fires, cleaning and so on.

All this is being done at the same time as the council is expected to deal with changes in the system of social work, including the alteration in the capital disregard when calculating the means available to clients for residential long-term care. That change was announced in last year's Budget, and the money being offered in recompense does not begin to meet the loss of income that the council will suffer.

Moreover, there are increased costs associated with paying for a raft of new social work duties involved in the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995.

Taken together, all these elements produce extreme financial pressure on social work departments such as the one run by Borders council. This evening, I call on the Government to look carefully again at these financial pressures, and I ask the Minister to consider whether it is possible, even at this late stage, to continue the three-year transitional relief that the council until recently enjoyed. That would give the council more time to prepare for the changes and to ease their implementation.

I suggest that the pilot scheme implemented by Borders council runs with the grain of Government policy. It seeks to do much of what the Government want councils in general to achieve. The scheme could serve as a model for other areas if it were properly financed and implemented.

The real danger for the Government is that the problems facing the council are likely to worsen significantly because of the shortage of money and the lack of time to make the necessary changes. That combination will lead to difficulties which, in the long run, will not do anything to promote the idea and policy of community care—a policy to which the Government are rightly committed.

A series of problems face Borders council at present, and the Government should be alive to them and should seek to work with the council to remedy them. First, there are the severe cuts that could be made to the income available to home care assistants. These are vital workers who perform intimate services for the clients they help, often for far longer than the hours for which they are paid. Their morale has, not surprisingly, been severely hit. If the good will of this vital group of workers is lost, we shall, in effect, have cut off our nose to spite our face.

Secondly, the break in continuity between clients and home care assistants is a worrying aspect of the changes. These relationships have often been built up over many years; they are invaluable to the physical, mental, social and psychological care of some clients, some of whom live in isolated parts of the rural, landward areas of the constituency. There is also the possibility that the contract requirements will be so restrictive and tightly drawn in terms of financial constraints that either they will not be tendered for by any organisation because it will be

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

impossible to keep their profit and loss accounts in the black, or they will be taken over by private companies that will make them work by cutting corners. As a consequence, standards will fall and the social work department will have to pick up the pieces.

I received a letter from the Royal College of Nursing which expands on some of those fears. It makes two points about the Scottish Borders council that the Government should take on board. First, it states:

"The RCN is particularly concerned that cutbacks in domiciliary care services will have knock-on effects on community health services,"—

which come out of another budget but are still public expenditure—

"placing yet more pressure on community nurses."

That would be in no one's interests.

Secondly, the RCN is rightly concerned about some of the aspects of the proposals to externalise some of the domiciliary services which

"raise questions of accountability and health and safety both for the carer and the client. There are also concerns about assessing the suitability of carers and whether police checks will be mandatory for services contracted out."

Those are all important questions.

I wonder whether we are giving ourselves enough time to think matters through, given the way in which the pilot project is being forced on the local council in the Borders. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale is most concerned and had he not had engagements elsewhere, he would have told the Minister that the financial constraints have been so severe that the Scottish Borders council social work department has been unable to negotiate realistic fees with the owners of local private homes. The department is simply laying down levels of fees that it can afford and that bear no relation to the costs borne by private home owners. Therefore, the plural provision in the private sector in the Borders region could be severely prejudiced.

I hope that the Government will examine the problem as a matter of urgency. I perceive a willingness to change and run with the grain of the Government's policy. Externalising some of those domiciliary services could be done sensibly in a bona fide way particularly through voluntary organisations such as Crossroads. However, such organisations would face great difficulties in tendering for contracts as they do not have the administrative or financial capability to do so. That is a great shame. It is also possible that home care assistants could organise a service more cheaply and efficiently and provide better value for money, but not within the time scale or in the present circumstances in the Borders. The Government should take those problems very much to heart and sort them out in future.

In conclusion, I hope that I have laid down some markers to show that there is real concern in the Scottish Borders about some of the enforced decisions that are being taken by the social work department. I pay tribute to the work that is being carried out, but there could be real problems later this year. If the pilot scheme does not work because client needs exceed the available budget and nobody tenders for the contracts to externalise the services, the social work department will be left with no alternative way of making the savings required but to cut the number of hours available to clients. That will put people at risk, so it is not acceptable. If things are bad this year, according to some of the references from Ministers that have been reported to me, they will be even worse next year.

Can the Minister reassure those who are struggling with the problems and trying their best to make the system work according to Government policy? They are shackled to taking difficult short-term decisions that are causing great distress to people who do not deserve to suffer in that way. We must sort out the mess and ensure that there is sensible provision of community care which meets the needs of clients in the Scottish Borders council area in the near future.

11.5 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on securing the debate, and on making many useful points tonight.

I have good news about Crossroads, which is currently funded by the Scottish Office. It recently received a one-off additional grant in recognition of its contribution. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues that are relevant not only to the Scottish borders but more widely regarding the arrangements for funding, service provision and support for the most vulnerable people in our society.

I shall address the specific points about community care services in the borders, but first I shall refer briefly to the funding of social work services in Scotland. The implementation of the community care policy has initiated a significant shift in the provision of health and social care services for vulnerable people towards care in their own homes and in residential accommodation in the community.

The substantial additional financial resources that have been allocated to authorities reflect the central role of social work departments in developing the pattern of social care provision in their areas. In the current year, local authorities have some £662 million available for their community care responsibilities, compared with £378 million at the beginning of the decade.

The hon. Gentleman referred to cuts in services and to concerns expressed by the Royal College of Nursing. By making more effective use of their resources, authorities should be in a strong position to ensure that appropriate levels of support are available for vulnerable people. The local authorities will continue to be responsible for undertaking care needs assessments. When services are contracted out, authorities will continue to promote standards through contract conditions. Users of contracted-out services will continue to have access to local authority complaints procedures. I accept the importance that the hon. Gentleman placed on monitoring.

An additional £250,000 has been allowed within the grant-aided expenditure allocation to the Scottish Borders council for the provision of adult community care services. We would encourage all local authorities to accord appropriate priority to the provision of services on which vulnerable people rely.

Concern has been expressed that the criteria for receiving home help services will be reassessed as part of the tendering process. As a matter of good practice, all local authorities should regularly re-examine the services

they provide, to ensure that resources are targeted properly. That exercise will identify the types of home care service that people require. Eligibility criteria in the borders will not be changed.

As to the cost of new circulars—for example, guidance about the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995—we have issued a number of guidance documents advising councils about their social work functions as part of the arrangements for local government reorganisation. They relate to existing responsibilities and do not require the provision of additional resources.

Transitional protection was provided to authorities where there was a traditionally high level of DSS expenditure on residential placements proportional to population needs. The arrangements ended last year, but monitoring of local authority expenditure on residential accommodation in the borders shows that the original DSS transfer allocation was generous.

I accept that many authorities are now reviewing their budgets. That is a matter of good practice, but it is particularly important when a legacy of reduced surpluses and unrealistically high underlying expenditure levels has been inherited from outgoing councils.

Reference was made to funding in the borders. I believe that the allocation was generous, as I said. Many of the residents in residential and nursing home care supported by DSS funding prior to 1993 had not been from the Borders. The borders region thus had no responsibility to fund its successors.

Despite that, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities agreed that Borders should receive funding, in the form of transitional protection, to help in the first three years. During that period, the former local authority's expenditure on purchasing places in independent sector residential and nursing home accommodation was well below the levels estimated when the DSS transfer allocation to the authority was calculated.

None the less, the allocation for community care responsibilities has increased by more than £250,000 from last year's level, to over £14 million. It is for the local authority to determine its funding priorities.

Particularly important is the fact that we have encouraged authorities to plan the use of current and future financial resources as part of a strategic approach to the provision of community care services. Authorities are therefore required to set out those proposals in their community care plans, which are reviewed—rightly—on an annual basis. In addition, local community care arrangements can be monitored closely, first, through local consultation; secondly, by the Scottish Office through research; thirdly, through statistical returns; fourthly, through the social work services inspectorate; and fifthly, through the community care implementation unit.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, that monitoring is very important. If people are to receive the services they need, authorities must aim to achieve value for money from all the services they purchase—both those purchased from independent providers and those from their in-house services.

Local authority residential care homes are generally substantially more expensive than independent sector homes, without necessarily providing better standards of care. Research has not found a relationship between cost and quality. The typical unit cost to Borders council of care for people in its own residential care homes is about £6,000 per person higher than equivalent independent sector provision. If people currently in local authority homes in the borders were in independent sector homes, the saving would be more than £1 million.

Our aim is not to end the long tradition of local authority provision of social care services. That would be neither practical nor desirable. However, as purchasers of community care services, authorities must ensure that they are even-handed in buying care provision and obtaining value for money in the best interests of the patients and consumers.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire has expressed concern about externalising home help services, which are currently provided in-house by Scottish Borders council. Total social work expenditure on home help services in Scotland is about £100 million each year. Almost all that is for services provided directly by authorities.

Compulsory competitive tendering has been introduced to the purchasing of many services provided by authorities, which includes many manual and white-collar jobs. That discipline has brought about substantial improvements in the cost and the quality of services and applies both to services purchased from independent sector providers and to the authorities' in-house teams, where they have been successful. We have not introduced compulsory competitive tendering to the provision of social work services, in the belief that authorities will seek to make the best use of their resources in helping vulnerable people,

Scottish Borders council's social work committee proposes to put out to tender part of the home help service for the elderly. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire is concerned about a loss of quality for the recipients of the services. Both he and I share an interest in maintaining a very high quality of care and securing value for money in the provision of services.

Potentially this is the first example of an authority purchasing such services from the independent sector on a significant scale. The contract will initially be for a 12-month period. The council has indicated that it will review the contract arrangements after nine months to ensure continuity of service provision. I can assure the hon. Member that we also will monitor the progress of this initiative.

Concern has also been expressed about the time scale for the tendering process. The council developed a specification for tendering for the home help service some time ago, which is applicable to its in-house service and to external providers. The specification articulates the principles of care, health and safety issues, procedures and routines, and reviews and staffing on which the service should be based.

The provision of home help services has increased markedly, even in the last five years. In 1990, more than 82,000 people in Scotland were assisted by home helps; by 1995 that had increased to over 93,000, a rise of 14 per cent. Over the same period, however, the increase in such services in the borders area was double the national figure—a rise of 28 per cent., to almost 2,000.

Despite that increase relative to population, the number of home helps in the borders was lower than in any other local authority in Scotland. It is against that background

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

that the authority is considering how it can best meet the needs of its local population. It is right that it should seek to purchase services as cost-effectively as possible. The terms of such purchases will be a matter for negotiation between the authority and individual providers.

It is inevitable that there will be a range of unit costs, just as there is a range of service demands. The home help service meets the needs of older persons in a wide range of practical ways, which vary among individuals, and range from help with household tasks such as shopping and cleaning to help with personal care tasks such as washing and dressing. Home helps often provide company as well as assistance for older people, but the local authority home help service largely excludes heavy lifting or working above floor level—for example, cleaning windows or replacing light bulbs—from its stated responsibilities.

Authorities must take account of differing needs when considering how services can best be delivered in the most cost-effective way. The views and interests of service users and their carers should also be considered. The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, which came into effect on 1 April, gives carers a statutory right to request an assessment of their own needs.

In the case of the home help service in the borders, the authority is, in the tendering process, differentiating between domestic and personal care, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. I understand that it is the former that is being put out to tender, while the more skilled personal care services will continue to be provided by staff who have a proven record in that area.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed concern about the conditions of home help staff when the management of services is transferred to independent sector providers. The vast majority of independent sector social care providers offer high-quality care and appropriate wage levels to their staff. As with other public sector areas, authorities have been encouraged to ensure that wage increases are funded from efficiency savings. If that advice has been followed, authorities should be able to tender for former local authority-managed services at realistic funding levels. Regardless of who provides the service, they must offer a high standard of care and be seen to do so.

The hon. Gentleman is rightly concerned about the quality of services. Contract specifications are very important. They must include criteria against which quality can be measured and monitored, so that the welfare of the recipients of the services can be protected. Another means of ensuring that standards are maintained is registration of providers. We believe that the current arrangements for self-regulation have proved an effective means of maintaining standards in the independent domiciliary sector.

The private sector played an integral role in the work of the Joint Advisory Group of Domiciliary Care Associations in producing a standards guidance document. The United Kingdom Homecare Association has also produced a code of practice for providers and a recommended complaints procedure for clients.

The need for statutory control of domiciliary care provision was considered in the Department of Health document "Moving Forward", on the regulation and inspection of services in England and Wales. It was also considered by the Scottish Office working group on residential care home registration procedures, which is due to report to very shortly. We shall then decide what action, if any, to take in the light of the working group's deliberations. Authorities may, however, introduce their own measures. I understand that Borders council purchases services only from independent sector providers that are registered with it as approved suppliers of domiciliary care.

The provision of domiciliary services, including home helps, is central to allowing older people to retain maximum independence. Our aim is for services to be developed that can respond flexibly and sensitively to the needs of individuals, and concentrate on those with the greatest need.

This year, the social work services inspectorate published a report on an inspection of local authority home help services for older people. It examined provision in six areas of Scotland, including Kelso. The report found that, overall, the home help service was reliable, but that difficulties were experienced at times of staff holidays and sickness, during evenings and at weekends, with certain household tasks such as window cleaning and with the frequency and length of service.

The report also—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 May 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for calling me to open the debate. My purpose this morning is to draw attention to a grave injustice and to secure for its victims the humane ministerial response they crave. I hope that the Leader of the House will assist them, as I know he will want to do if he can, by asking the Secretary of State for Health for a helpful statement to incorporate in his reply to this debate.

Some wrongs are so patently clear that we ought not to have to campaign to put them right. One of the most glaring today is the unmerited extra suffering inflicted on people with haemophilia who were infected with hepatitis C by NHS treatment. They were prescribed under the NHS—3,100 of them—contaminated blood products to correct the severe bleeding that people with haemophilia have to endure.

Hepatitis C attacks the liver and is potentially life-threatening. Current medical opinion is that up to 80 per cent. of those infected will develop chronic liver disease. Of these, some 20 per cent. will develop severe liver problems such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. More than 50 of those infected by contaminated NHS blood products have already died and the death rate is accelerating.

Deaths caused by "new" Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease—CJD—cases are running at the rate of five a year. That is fewer than the deaths from hepatitis C caused in the past year by NHS treatment. In the case of CJD, there is no suggestion of NHS involvement; but if those infected with hepatitis C by contaminated NHS blood products had received even a thousandth of the media attention given to the CJD cases, there would be an insistent public demand for Ministers now to meet their plea for help.

This huge tragedy in the haemophilia community dates back to before 1986, when heat treatment was introduced to end the contamination of NHS blood products. But by then there had been mass infection among them with hepatitis C. In recognition of the scale of the tragedy, the Haemophilia Society launched a campaign in March 1995 for financial and medical help for those infected.

It is much to the credit of this House that there were right hon. and hon. Members of every party who immediately pledged their support and, as the Leader of the House will know, more than 260 Members of Parliament have now signed my early-day motion backing the campaign. Anyone who looks at its list of signatories will see that the issue is treated by the motion not as one between right and left in this Chamber, but of right and wrong. Of very special help in promoting the motion has been the active involvement of the hon. Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith)—who co-chairs with me the all-party group of Members of Parliament now assisting the campaign—and of my hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie). I want to emphasise here that no one could possibly have done more to promote the cause we have espoused than the hon. Member for Hendon, South.

To sustain its campaign, the Haemophilia Society recently published the results of in-depth research into the problems and needs of people who were infected but are not yet seriously ill. The report, sent to the Department of Health, documents the damaging impact of hepatitis C not only on individuals but on whole families. It focuses on medical, social and financial problems and makes frightening reading. In case study after case study families are seen trying to cope with sickness, loss of income, loss of jobs and loss of independence. Individuals with the disease, while trapped in an uphill struggle to maintain their families, have to live day by day with what they know could soon become a terminal illness.

One of the most urgent needs now is financial help to loosen the vice of reduced earnings and increased costs. That is why the Haemophilia Society is calling urgently for cash grants from the Government for those infected and the dependants of those who have already died.

The society's plea does not, however, stop there. It seeks funding for appropriate treatment and counselling as well as clear guidance from the Department of Health on the management and treatment of hepatitis C. Again, more research by the Government is requested. While £1 million has been put aside for research into the prevalence, transmission and natural history of the virus, the Haemophilia Society also wants to see research into treatment therapy, more particularly combination therapy.

Other pressing needs are for a public education programme to explain the facts and dispel the myths about hepatitis C; and for the funding of recombinant clotting factors to replace plasma-derived products that caused not only the hepatitis C infection but the HIV infection among people with haemophilia. It is emphasised by the society that recombinant products are free of the risk of blood-borne viruses and would thus exclude any third tragedy for the haemophilia community.

The call for help from those with hepatitis C has to be seen in the context of what was done to assist the 1,200 people with haemophilia who were infected with the HIV virus by NHS treatment. The hepatitis C infection took place at the same time as the HIV infection. The cause was the same: contaminated blood products used in their treatment. The effect can be equally deadly. Yet those infected with hepatitis C and their dependants now receive nothing from a Government who provided £70 million in financial support for those infected with HIV and instituted a hardship fund—the Macfarlane fund—to give continuing support. The Government accepted their moral responsibility in the case of HIV. Now they have the same responsibility in the case of hepatitis C.

The fate of three brothers says it all about the depth of the injustice to the 3,100 people with haemophilia who were infected with hepatitis C. All three brothers had

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

haemophilia. Two were infected with HIV by NHS treatment and the other with hepatitis C. All have subsequently died from the infections. The brothers with HIV received financial help from the Macfarlane trust and so were able to make some provision for their families. The brother who died from hepatitis C went to his grave having been denied financial help. He was thus unable to make any provision for the future well-being of his family. All three brothers became terminally ill. All died as a result of infection through NHS treatment, yet only two received help. For anyone to call that fair or even tolerable is to bark not just up the wrong tree, but in the wrong forest.

It may be argued that compensating the people infected with hepatitis C would take money away from patient care in the NHS. But in the case of HIV the payments made to those infected came from contingency moneys and this is what the Haemophilia Society is asking for now in the case of hepatitis C. It simply wants the terms of reference of the Macfarlane trust to be extended to include those infected with hepatitis C. Its claim is an extremely modest one measured against the pain and suffering inflicted on those for whom the contaminated blood products were prescribed and their families.

While representatives of the Haemophilia Society have been given a sympathetic hearing at a meeting with the Under–Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), the Government have still to respond to its report about the damaging effects of the contamination on its victims. But Ministers can no longer claim not to know what needs to be done and it is now their bounden duty to act. If they will not do so and the campaign for recompense has to go on, then go on it will and with renewed urgency until justice is done.

9.44 am

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Before the House rises for the Whitsun recess, we need to be reassured that the Government fully appreciate what the European Court of Justice has done, is doing and will—unless stopped—continue to do to the powers and laws of this justifiably proud nation state.

At last, the extent of the powers that we have allowed the court to have is being brought home to us all. We are to pay £30 million in compensation to Spanish fishermen who took and used British quota through the simple device of buying British-registered ships, which this British Parliament specifically said should not happen when we passed the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. We are threatened with an absurd 48-hour limit on the working week, which nearly all of us will have to follow despite the Prime Minister's specific and conceded opt-out of the social chapter at Maastricht. The ban on our worldwide export of probably the safest beef in the world is said by our European partners to be in accord with powers vested in them by the treaty of Rome, which they expect to be upheld by the European Court of Justice, which overwhelmingly supports the European Union against the nation states throughout Europe, not only Britain.

It is now becoming clear, although the matter does not receive much coverage in the media, that we have acquiesced in the creation of a power-hungry mechanism that appears programmed to destroy our national sovereignty widely, deeply and permanently. This is not the thing we thought it was, and it is certainly not the thing we expected or wanted it to be when we voted to join, and when we voted to stay in, the Common Market.

We were told in the judgment of a court case in 1992:

> "As the Court of Justice has consistently held, the Community treaties established a new legal order for the benefit of which the States have limited their sovereign rights, in ever wider fields, and the subjects of which comprise not only the member-States but also their nationals. The essential characteristics of the Community Legal Order which has thus been established are in particular its primacy over the law of the member-States and the direct effect of a whole series of provisions which are applicable to their nationals and to the member-States themselves."

That is news to most of us.

Of course we knew when we joined, and when we decided to stay in, that we had surrendered some sovereignty to a trading bloc, and we knew and accepted the need for a court to ensure that there was an even application of Community law and to protect the nation states from abuse of power by Community institutions. But we did not realise that we were subjecting ourselves to a court that practised what the former warden of All Souls, the distinguished lawyer Sir Patrick Neill, called "creative jurisprudence"—interpreting conflicts expansively instead of restrictively, as our courts are accustomed to do.

The European Court of Justice has been steadily interpreting the treaty of Rome so that it is made to say what no one thought it said. The reason is that it has been acting less like a court of justice and more like a court with the political mission of political union. The court set out its new status in the passage to which I have already referred. The role of the court has changed: it used to operate in "a limited field", but it is now operating in "ever-wider fields". The European Court of Justice believes that the treaty has empowered it to become the engine of a federated super-state, a united states of Europe to be served by a supreme court. The purpose of a supreme court is to serve the written constitution of a state. It has become the powerhouse of that united state.

Sir Patrick Neill QC, in an address to the European research group—which is led by my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer)—said:

> "A court with a mission is a menace. A supreme court with a mission is a tyranny."

That prompts the question: do we need such a court? The European Economic Area treaty achieves free movement of goods and services, competition and deregulation without the need for a supreme court. The general agreement on tariffs and trade functions without the need for a supreme court. It is enough to have a simple procedure for settling disputes.

It is no surprise—with the philosophy of a supreme court to serve the constitution of a political union operating over and above nation states—that the European Court of Justice, which consists mainly of civil servants and academics from different political cultures and traditions, has been overruling our courts. It has been telling our courts what they must do and it has even been trying to overrule our democratically elected Parliament. Like pac-men, the European Court of Justice has been busy gobbling up the powers of nation states.

How has that position been developing? I shall give some examples. First, the European Court of Justice has altered the powers allocated to it—it operated in "limited

fields", but it is now operating in "wider fields". Secondly, the court has said that the treaties make rights and duties directly applicable to individuals without any need for national laws to authorise them—there was nothing about that in the treaties. Thirdly, it has ruled that a treaty has to be interpreted not merely according to the wording of its provision, but by reference to what it considers to be the spirit of the provision. That is dangerous and we pointed out that reliance would be placed on the preamble, which is a process that we do not accept in this country. We had long debates about Maastricht in the Chamber.

Fourthly, the European Court of Justice has held that directives, which the treaties do not make binding, must also have direct effect without the need for legislation to be passed by national legislatures. Fifthly, it has invented an action for damages against any state that is impertinent enough to fail to implement a directive—there is nothing in the treaties about that. Sixthly, the European Court of Justice now asserts a power to limit the retroactive effect of its judgments—again, there is no such power in the treaties.

Seventhly, the European Court of Justice is not satisfied with all that law making, and it is hungry for more power: it has extended its jurisdiction so that it can review the legality of decisions made by the European Parliament—there is nothing about that in the treaties. Eighthly, the European Court of Justice now allows the European Parliament to challenge the acts of the Council of Ministers—if that is not changing the law while pretending to interpret it, I do not know what is. As a result of that, the powers had to be enshrined in the Maastricht treaty.

Ninthly, the European Court of Justice has expanded its jurisdiction to rule on the decisions of the body that decides on association agreements between the European Union and other states, such as Turkey—there is nothing about that in the treaties. Tenthly, it has decided that it could assist in criminal investigations by national courts—there is nothing about that in the treaties. In 1992, it decided that national courts could be allowed to declare Community actions valid, but that they could not declare Community actions invalid. And so it goes on.

It appears that we must now be bound by a retrospective law, contrary to our traditions, and that we must pay ship money to those who, by any test of common sense, are not entitled to it. If we do not act, that will continue to go on and on.

What can be done? The Government's White Paper recognises that change is necessary, and I suspect that it has the complete support of every hon. Member.

The few Europhiles in the Chamber and in the country often say that the Euro-sceptics—who overwhelmingly want to see Britain remain in the European Union; there are very few Euro-sceptics who want to see Britain pull out of the European Union—are a minority. That is rubbish. The Euro-sceptics are an overwhelming majority not only on Government Benches and, I suspect, on Opposition Benches, but in the country at large.

There will be support for the Government's White Paper recommendations. There is reference to the functions of the court being further improved, to judgments giving cause for concern and to the European Court of Justice interpretation sometimes going beyond what was intended. The White Paper suggests that damages should be only for serious breaches, that retrospectivity should be limited and that time limits should be introduced for the bringing of cases. It suggests that an internal appeals procedure should be introduced, subsidiarity clarified and procedures streamlined.

But limiting the expansion of powers is one thing; we need to cut back on the current powers of the court. On 24 April, the Prime Minister said to the Institute of Directors:

"I can tell you . . . I have no intention whatsoever of going down the route to a federal Europe."

On 11 May, the Prime Minister told the Scottish party conference:

"Yes, Britain must be a part of Europe and a partner of Europe, but a Europe of nations, not a united states of Europe, not a federal Europe. Once again I make this pledge: while I am Prime Minister, if others should opt for such a Europe, Britain will not be part of it."

Hon. Members will be heartened by those statements and their application to the European Court of Justice. We look forward to the memorandum that will set out in detail the proposals laid down in the White Paper. However, we must go further than the Government envisage. We should be able to see which judges are being too political or are acting in the national interests of their country, so the court's proceedings and the judges' reasons should be published. Why is that not being done already? We should require judges of the European Court of Justice to be more than just civil servants and academics. They should have experience as judges in their countries—only four out of the 15 present judges have such experience.

We should ensure that European law is no longer directly applicable to individuals and businesses within the European Union unless the nation states so legislate. Such a rule would prevent the European Court of Justice from extending European Union competence without the consent of the nations. If that extension is not halted, we shall not prevent the march towards a federal Europe to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is so opposed. The European Court of Justice must be denied all legislative functions. We must amend the 1972 treaty—by agreement if possible—to restrict the court's powers and to stop future expansion. We must do all that we can to ensure that the powers of the nation states are restored.

A great deal of work must be done in order to restore Britain's powers. Harsh conclusions must be drawn not just by lawyers, but by politicians. The agreement of our European partners—who are rooted in different legal cultures and have different political aims—may not come easily, and action by Britain alone may put at risk our membership of the European Union. However, it is clear that the British people are angry about the loss of national power and control. They require their democratically elected representatives to do something about it, and the political party that acts to protect national sovereignty will be more likely to benefit from their gratitude.

There is no clearer starting point than limiting the pac-man tendency of the European Court of Justice. Before the Whitsun recess, I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to give an assurance that the Government are contemplating precisely that sort of action.

10.1 am

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) began this morning's debate

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

by raising a matter of injustice. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) has spoken—I thought somewhat unconvincingly—about restoring power to nation states and reducing the influence of the European Court of Justice. I, too, wish to raise a case of gross injustice but, regrettably, it concerns an area where injustices are the norm rather than the exception and where the majority of people are desperate for the services of a free court of justice.

I refer to a case involving my constituent Adefolahan Mokuolu, who is a British citizen. On 23 April, he visited Nigeria for the first time and he was abducted from his father's home in Anthony village, Lagos, by members of the Nigerian special security forces. He has been held virtually incommunicado from that date, at what I believe are the forces' headquarters at 2 Park lane, Apapa. An appalling case becomes doubly so when one learns that my constituent is 13 years old.

When my constituent's mother alerted me of the incident on 9 May this year, I immediately contacted the Nigeria desk at the Foreign Office, and the officers were extremely helpful in contacting consular officials in Lagos. I also alerted the acting high commissioner at the Nigerian high commission in London, Mr. Okeke. As yet, I have received no positive response from him other than confirmation that he sent a copy of my fax to headquarters in Lagos.

My constituent was born on 1 March 1983 at St. Mary's hospital, Hackney. He attends a school in St. John's Wood. He is passionate about football. He is a British citizen who was on his first visit to Nigeria. He loved the country. He met his mother's relatives for the first time and he enjoyed the company of a large, extended Nigerian family. The Nigerian Government argue that, because both of his parents are Nigerian citizens, my constituent has dual nationality and they have therefore twice denied British consular officials access to him. That is absolutely appalling.

On the first occasion that British consular officials presented themselves at 2 Park lane, Apapa, the special security forces denied that my constituent was being held. On the second occasion, consular officials arrived at the same time as one of the uncles of my constituent who had taken food to the boy during his incarceration. Access was again denied to British consular officials, and my constituent's uncle was warned that if he made any attempt to approach those officials, his life would be in danger.

When I inquired of my constituent's mother why she thought that her son had been abducted in that heinous manner, she said that it was because his father is the cousin of a previous Nigerian President, Major-General Odasanja. It is totally unacceptable that a 13-year-old boy who probably has no interest in the politics of his own country—the United Kingdom—could be deemed to be interested or active in the politics of Nigeria. It is also totally unacceptable that he is still being held virtually incommunicado.

On 16 May, the boy's uncle was allowed to see him. I have since heard that the special security forces are feeding my constituent, who has his own room, and I understand that they are washing his clothes. However, no one is allowed to see him without a guard being present. It is not acceptable that a 13-year-old British citizen, who has been raised as a British citizen and who regards Britain as his home—which it is—should be incarcerated in that way. I am grateful for the assistance that I have received from the Nigeria desk and the Foreign Office. I have alerted the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to the conditions in which my constituent is being held.

I felt initially that British consular officials in Lagos were not responding as energetically and persistently as I desired. However, they are now pursuing the case. I appreciate the difficulties faced by all consular departments in attempting to deal with a regime that has little or no regard for human rights or civil liberties. I urge the Leader of the House to make even stronger representations to his right hon. Friends, that the case be placed at the top of the list for action by consular officials in Nigeria. Representations about the case should be made not only to other Commonwealth Governments, but to our European allies.

When I received information that my constituent's uncle had been threatened by the special security forces and warned not to attempt to contact British consular officials, I was doubtful as to whether it was wise to raise the issue on the Floor of the House. We are a long way from Nigeria, but it would be entirely possible for that brutal regime to punish my constituent's relatives if it so chose. Therefore, I attempted to obtain as much impartial advice as I could.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who put me in touch with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association secretariat. I cannot speak too highly of the assistance that it gave me in contacting other members of the Commonwealth and introducing me to expatriate Nigerians. They all advised me to speak out in the House and alert hon. Members to the gross abuses that are being visited upon a British citizen of such a tender age, who is so far from home and on his first visit to that country. I am sure that everyone will find the painful story that I have related this morning both shocking and unacceptable.

I hope that the Leader of the House can reassure me that every effort will be made by the Foreign Office and consular officials to restore my constituent to his home in the shortest possible time. His mother, Mrs. Christine Mokuolu, flew out to Nigeria last Sunday so that she could be closer to her son. As yet, I have no news that she has been allowed to visit him, but I sincerely hope that that will be the case—and that such pressure as can be brought to bear on the Nigerian authorities will ensure that Mrs. Mokuolu and her son will be allowed to return to their home as soon as possible.

10.9 am

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I want to raise two unfinished pieces of business before the House adjourns for the spring bank holiday recess. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recall that my speech last Thursday on the beef crisis was—for reasons that I perfectly understand—terminated mid-sentence by you, as I was reflecting on the consequences of the ban on British beef for our relations with the European Union. Happily, I not only have the opportunity to return to that subject this morning but do so in the light of the important statement yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Nye Bevan said 40 or 50 years ago that Britain was an island built of coal and surrounded by fish. If he had been more of a countryman, he might have said also that it was a nation of beef eaters, and coal, fish and beef have dominated this Parliament well beyond the point of representing the interests of the communities immediately affected. When we dealt with the coal issue four years ago, I received several hundred letters from my constituents, many of them Conservative supporters, even though there is not a coal mine anywhere near Taunton or Somerset. That response reflected the fact that coal was a traditional industry. Similarly, my constituency is landlocked but my constituents have a considerable interest in the way in which this country appears to have been done down over the handling of the common fisheries policy.

Concern about the beef industry extends far beyond the people in farming or the food industry, who are most affected. The public realise that, even though we are about to enter the third millennium, our traditional industries are still established sources of British strength and economic power. When my speech was terminated last Thursday, I was about to reflect that the sole casualty of, in part, the beef ban would be support by Conservative Members and the public, particularly in the countryside, for Britain proceeding in the foreseeable future to European monetary union. The point would be crudely put that, if we cannot trust our European partners to take account of our interests in such a limited matter—but important to us—as the beef industry, surely we cannot allow Europe's collective thumb to be placed across our economic windpipe.

My view is reinforced by arguments that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has used in private and in public as to the difficulties inherent in a speedy, and perhaps botched and limited, monetary union; by the impressive article in *The Times* yesterday by Professor Nölling, who served on the Bundesbank council between 1982 and 1992; and by not only small firms—which have always been aware of the risks to this country of proceeding to monetary union and a single currency—but larger companies.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government have been unjustly accused in the press of dithering in respect of the beef crisis. I said yesterday to my right hon. Friend that the Government have exercised great patience with our European partners. British Ministers wanted time and again to let our European partners resolve the issue by diplomacy and negotiation. Our hopes have been raised at least six or seven times, only to be dashed a day or two later. I understand the legal restraints on Britain taking trade or financial reprisals, so I welcome yesterday's statement as being within the bounds of law—and it seems from today's reaction that it will have a suitably disruptive effect on European Union procedures over the next month. That will give our partners a considerable incentive to resolve the matter in a sensible and civilised way. It was clear yesterday that the Leader of the Opposition was uneasy about how to respond.

Some people argue that the intentions expressed in yesterday's statement will make matters worse, but I do not agree. If it does make matters worse, that will be largely up to our European partners. If they settle in for a long siege, so be it. They must remember the strong political feeling engendered in this country over the past eight weeks in addition to the existing discontents with the European Union—one of which was spelt out this morning by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) in his impressive and scholarly speech. Fisheries policy is another. I find that, in my constituency—and I suspect that my hon. Friends have similar experiences—supporters who have worked hard for Conservative Members of the European Parliament and for the European cause in the past are joining the ranks of the most critical.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Has my hon. Friend seen the report in today's *Financial Times* that the European Parliament's administrative budget has risen from 596 million ecu in 1994 to a proposed 934 million ecu in 1997—an increase of 56.7 per cent? Does not my hon. Friend regard that as grossly extravagant and demonstrating that there is no desire in that organisation to control costs?

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, and leads me on to my next point.

Our European partners must not only take account of indignation with the way in which our European partners have handled the beef issue over the past few weeks, and of strong support for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but of the facts that the UK has for years run a sizeable deficit on trade with Europe in food and drink, and on wider trade; that we pay more into the European Union than we get out of it; and that the UK pays more in than any other country except Germany. Those financial points, in sheer cost, must be taken into account as we proceed with these matters.

A couple of days ago, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, claimed in a speech that a spate of xenophobia is rushing through the Conservative party and that the Prime Minister is exploiting that xenophobia. My hon. Friends must speak for themselves. I do not think that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton is xenophobic—I certainly am not. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, a majority of EU countries backed our attempt to end the ban on beef products. That does not exactly seem like the fruits of xenophobia to which the leader of the Liberal party referred.

We welcome the help that France has given us in recent days, following the highly successful visit to this country of President Chirac. He made an impressive speech to both Houses of Parliament in the Royal Gallery; I did not agree with every word of it, but given that France and Britain have had a long rivalry, it was a friendly speech too. Of all the countries in the European Union, France and Britain are the most similar in terms of history and tradition. But that similarity often produces intense competition, politically, militarily, economically and commercially. The pressure in France to lift the ban on British beef derives from the fact that the French want to buy it and thus have an interest in importing it.

Moreover, the French people and, increasingly, French politicians are as suspicious of federalism and centralisation in Europe as we have become. In 1992, before the difficulties arose with the Maastricht treaty debate and before the French referendum, a group of mayors and other dignitaries from a part of Normandy—les sept villages du Vexin—that had been hotly disputed

[Mr. Nicholson]

by England and France in the days of King John came to my constituency, to North Curry, for a twinning ceremony. During the celebrations, one mayor, speaking of the Maastricht treaty, told me that the French expected the English to "stop this sort of thing". For a long time now, that has been our experience in the European Union. People in other countries dare not put their heads above the parapet but expect us to fight their battles for them.

A colleague told me the other day that, at the time of the Maastricht treaty, he met a group of doctors in France and asked them what they thought of the treaty. They said that they were against it. My colleague asked whether they had made their position clear. "Oh no," they said, "if we did that, the Government would cut off all funding to our organisation." Of course the Government at the time were the socialist Government of President Mitterrand.

So this country does not need to resort to xenophobia, because even in this commercial matter of beef we increasingly find that we have allies in Europe.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): While my hon. Friend is on the subject of twinning, he might like to comment on a case highlighted in this morning's paper. A village in his county, near Wellington, is expecting German visitors next week as part of the twinning process. The Germans are insisting that they must not be served British beef during their visit. As my hon. Friend represents that county, I am sure that he shares my anger and disappointment at the Germans' attitude to what should be a friendly visit.

Mr. Nicholson: I was coming to the Germans. I will look into the matter; it is outrageous that they should refuse to eat one of our healthiest and most staple products. I gather that the German players who will take part in the international football tournament here in a few months' time are insisting that the beef they eat be imported from Germany. They are not prepared to eat ours—

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Before the hon. Gentleman takes off on a flight of fancy, I might point out to him that most national football teams take their own chefs and food with them, for a variety of good reasons. The eating habits of a football team are often reflected in the way the team plays on the pitch—which is probably why our football team plays crap.

Mr. Nicholson: I defer to the hon. Gentleman's greater knowledge of the subject.

On Radio 4's "World at One" programme on Monday, there was an interesting discussion of the Germans and how they differ from other Europeans. They are obsessed with health. Perhaps that might be justified by cartoon depictions—and sometimes the reality—of Germans on the beach. But it is their obsession with health that has led them to adopt their extraordinary position on British beef—and on German beef and on all kinds of meat. It has caused them considerable problems along the way.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we had been a little more obsessed with health in the early 1980s, we would not be faced with the BSE problem now?

Mr. Nicholson: Like many of his hon. Friends, the hon. Gentleman cannot extricate himself from the warped thinking which has led his party to contribute so much to our continuing national difficulties on this matter.

I want to issue three cautions in this debate. First, I urge Ministers to make it clear—the Prime Minister did yesterday, but the point must be repeated over and over again—that we are interested not just in lifting the beef products ban, which accounts for only a few million pounds' worth of exports, but in a speedy and businesslike timetable for lifting the ban on the whole beef export trade, which is worth about £500 million.

Secondly, Ministers must be absolutely clear in their own minds what they plan to do following the intentions announced yesterday. There is no need to broadcast the details continually, which is why the Prime Minister was wise not to respond specifically to some of the questions asked yesterday; but there must be no backsliding. If we do not get fair treatment, we must act accordingly.

Thirdly, Ministers must not use the European row as a figleaf to cover up deficiencies in the way the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the bodies aligned with it sort out the problem in the United Kingdom. I refer of course to the beef cull. Yesterday hon. Members representing the south-west received a briefing from the south-west branch of the National Farmers Union. I ensured that my hon. Friends the Parliamentary Secretaries to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Members for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) and for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), had copies with them yesterday on the Front Bench when the statements were being made. The briefing does not make easy or happy reading. The leader of the Liberal party, whom I have on occasion criticised, referred to the deficiencies affecting the abattoirs in the south-west, whose throughput has been halved in the past few days, apparently because of the need to bring another abattoir on stream in south Wales.

These problems need sorting out. I know that the Leader of the House heads a Cabinet Committee on this matter, and I stress to him that if, when the House returns after the recess, we are still encountering the same sort of difficulties as farmers, abattoir managers and others have faced in the past week, Conservative Members will strongly criticise the officials concerned, and we will draw our own conclusions about the control and responsibility being exercised by Ministers. I hope that those warnings are heard.

The second unfinished matter to which I shall refer relates to the Housing Bill. My right hon. Friend will recall that the debate on the homeless provisions of that Bill was attenuated the other week and that I raised the matter at business questions. The issue has interested many of my constituents who are not and do not expect to be affected by homelessness or homeless provisions. That demonstrates the ability of the British people in general, and my constituents in particular, to take a reasoned interest in matters that do not directly affect them—whether it is in the interests of the country or the interests of compassion and the decent treatment of others.

The changes in the legislation that is now in the other place should be clear and justifiable and should not penalise people who have no alternative but to seek help from local authorities or housing associations. It is a complex matter and I was not proposing to oppose the Government's measures—I wanted to clarify them and debate them.

I feel strongly that young people in particular should live at the family home, if that is possible. We have to use our existing housing stock more effectively rather than consistently building on green-field sites, whether for owner-occupation or for housing associations. I am aware of much stronger resistance to such housing development than existed in previous years. On Monday, the *Western Daily Press* devoted a full page to housing developments on green-field sites being earmarked for major housing expansion throughout the south-west—in Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset. Those developments will encounter considerable difficulties as they go through the planning process.

Some young people clearly cannot live with their parents, but they should not always expect to be housed by the public sector if they come to Taunton, which is a major railway and road focus, to Somerset or to the south-west. The south-west seems to attract many young people—possibly as part of the traveller cult or because the area is so attractive. I do not believe that that can be justified by economic factors as unemployment levels in the north and the south have drawn closer in recent years. We no longer have a pattern of people moving from unemployment black spots in the north to fill job vacancies in the south. That is regrettable for those of us who live in and represent the south, but it is an economic factor that also has certain benefits.

I make those provisos to assist Ministers in proceeding with the Bill. Local people deserve suitable priority on housing lists, which should not be interrupted or replaced by the pressure of so-called homeless people from elsewhere. At the same time—as I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration during our brief debate on the matter—I appreciate that in my constituency, and no doubt elsewhere, there has been an unsatisfactory provision of private rented accommodation which means that the presupposition in the Bill that homeless people should first be housed in the private rented sector should not always be followed through too rigidly.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has agreed to see me and one or two of those involved from Taunton Deane borough council and from the local office of Shelter who have been extremely helpful to me.

I have long wanted to revive the private rented sector. I lived in quite satisfactory private rented accommodation in London from 1966 to 1976. However, I realise that the private rented sector—particularly the traditional little old lady who rents out rooms in her house—has declined over the past 20 years, partially because of Government policy, and that although it has revived somewhat, it is predominated by absentee landlords owning bed-sitters that are not always satisfactorily managed and do not always attract satisfactory tenants into the neighbourhood. We need to get those matters absolutely right before the Bill proceeds finally into law.

I emphasise that public concern for decent treatment for homeless people is greatly met by the Government's rough sleepers initiative, which has been successful in London and has been expanded into other centres all over the country. It requires proper co-ordination between central Government, local government and various voluntary organisations.

Most homeless people do not just have the problem of absence of a secure home. Many of them have been involved with drugs or alcoholism or come from disrupted homes. There is work for all organisations involved in helping those young people—whether they are voluntary or social organisations or simply provide housing. I would like it no longer to be necessary for such young people—I saw them again last night in the west end of London—to have to sleep rough and beg. We all regret that the cult of begging is increasing, and it is not justified. I would like those issues to be challenged by further successes for the rough sleepers initiative in London and elsewhere.

10.36 am

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I shall intervene briefly in today's adjournment debate to raise my constituents' objection to the proposed privatisation of the Port of Tyne authority. Before I do so, I should say to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) that Nye Bevan did not include beef in his famous statement about being surrounded by fish and living on coal, because many of the people he represented could not afford to buy beef.

The fact that I am raising an issue during a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate brought about by the Jopling changes does not mean that I agree with the Jopling changes. I opposed them when they were introduced, I am still against them and I certainly do not condone them. In my view, the implementation of the Jopling recommendations and the clean feed to Members' rooms has made the Chamber virtually redundant. However, I shall not press my views on the Jopling recommendations, bearing in mind that the senior salaries review committee is still sitting.

Privatisation is raising justifiable fears in my constituency. I do not believe that the proposals are in the best interests of my constituents or of our region, and they are opposed by the Port of Tyne authority, local authorities in the area and many of the port users.

Having been born within a thousand yards of the banks of the River Tyne and having spent most of my working life working in shipyards there, I should draw the House's attention to the importance of the port of Tyne.

The River Tyne once had a shallow entrance that became troublesome as ships steadily grew in size during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Tyne improvement commission was established by an Act of Parliament in 1850. Its task was to carry out such schemes and works to make the river safe and accessible for modern ships, and to provide facilities for increasing seaborne trade.

In the first 20 years, the commission had 50 million tonnes of spoil removed from the river. Anyone who knows anything about rivers will realise the scale of dredging for that amount of spoil. The Tyne improvement commission's works have proved to be far-sighted. When it laid its plans, virtually all the vessels using the port were sailing craft of less than 1,000 tonnes.

Today, the Tyne regularly accepts ships of more than 45,000 tonnes in dead weight, and dry dock vessels weighing up to 100,000 tonnes. Indeed, hon. Members may have seen on television last night the giant 80,000-tonne bulk carrier Solitaire being taken to the Swan Hunter shipyard. That will provide some work for those who were made redundant when Swan Hunter unfortunately closed some time ago.

The commission built the Northumberland dock and the north and south piers. Within 50 years of the setting up of the commission, the port as we know it today was

[Mr. Don Dixon]

mainly in place. The commission continued to manage and improve the river as an engine of economic growth until 1968, when it handed it over to its successor. The Port of Tyne authority was set up under an Act of Parliament as a trust port to control the facilities that were previously operated by the commissioners.

The earliest trade on the River Tyne was in grain and forest products from the low countries, Scandinavia and the Balkans. Those areas are still important today, but the port's interests now also extend to the far east, Australia, south-east Asia, India, the middle east, Canada and the Americas—in fact, all over the world. The port regularly handles valuable metals, vehicles, offshore equipment, foodstuffs, machinery, clothing, chemicals, oil, scrap metal, and, of course, coal.

Last year, the port exported more than 1.8 million tonnes of coal and coke, and of course we sent Andy Cole to Manchester United. The port also exported more than 28,000 tonnes of chemicals, 180,000 tonnes of grain, 175,000 cars and other vehicles and 316,000 tonnes of general commodities. Its cargo handling facilities dealt with exports and imports in excess of 3.7 million tonnes. With its royal quays in North Shields, the port of Tyne provides the most northerly terminal on the east coast for passengers using sea routes to Scandinavia. Last year, more than 360,000 passengers and almost 60,000 cars used the port.

The port of Tyne is now one of the most efficient and flexible ports in Europe, and is engaged in a further investment programme to increase its capacity and quality of service to port users. In the past 12 years, the Port of Tyne authority has invested more than £45 million in berths and equipment. That investment has been complemented by facilities built by port users and industrialists in the area. The port authority has played a major role with developing agencies such as the Tyne and Wear development corporation and others to attract investment and new industries.

The port of Tyne has large capital reserves. I am informed that trading produces a current annual profit of £5 million from a turnover of £15 million. It has no outstanding debts. Such healthy figures are likely to make the port attractive to asset-stripping bidders. We are used to asset strippers in my area. In fact, on the riverside of Jarrow, a statue of Charles Mark Palmer looks over the River Tyne. Charles Mark Palmer set up the old Palmers shipyard, which at one time employed more than 10,000—mostly skilled—men.

The asset-stripper Shipbuilding Security Ltd. was set up by shipbuilders, shipowners and merchant bankers in the 1930s. It came to Jarrow, decided to close Palmers shipyard and sell off the assets, and placed a 40-year embargo on the building of ships. So we have experience of asset stripping, and are concerned that it might happen to the port of Tyne if some company comes along with an asset-stripping bid. Purchase by another port is also possible. That would of course mean rationalisation of the port's services, and the port of Tyne could again lose out.

I am also informed that the proceeds of any privatisation would go to central Government. As the port of Tyne was formed as a result of locally generated investment in trade and by local subscriptions, such a process would be an unfair extraction of regional resources by central Government. There has been a decline in the export of coal and coke—between 1990 and 1995, it fell by more than 600,000 tonnes—so there is a great need to invest in new facilities.

A recent example of such investment is the construction of the Nissan car handling facility and container sites. The capital resources of the Port of Tyne authority are needed for further investment on that scale. Privatisation could lead to a reduction in developments, mainly because the maximising of profits in the short term could replace longer-term development as the priority of any new owners and shareholders.

Originally, a number of trust ports were to be privatised by the Government, including Dover. I believe that even Vera Lynn became involved in the public outcry about the proposed privatisation of Dover, and it was dropped from the scheme. One wonders whether Government policy is determined by such public outcry. If Vera Lynn had sang about fog on the Tyne instead of bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover, perhaps the Government would have changed their policy and dropped the port of Tyne from their privatisation scheme.

Since such privatisation will pass through the House by means of a negative resolution, this may be my only opportunity to raise the issue on the Floor of the House. I appeal to the Government not to privatise the Port of Tyne authority. It is important to the revitalisation of our area, it is doing a good job, and it should be allowed to get on with it.

10.45 am

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The House will have listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), recognising that, because of his position in his party, he has little opportunity to speak. I found his speech informative. I know the port of Tyne. Indeed, in the halcyon days when I did a proper job before I entered the House, I used to ship a great deal of grain from the port. He is right to bring the very important subject before the House.

Other ports that have been privatised and have taken the private capital from the process, which the port of Tyne desperately needs, have been extremely successful. I personally hope that the port of Tyne goes down that road, but I bow to the superior knowledge and wisdom on the subject of the hon. Member for Jarrow.

On a somewhat grey May morning, when the House is about to adjourn for what I think is known as the spring recess, one's thoughts turn to summer. Hopefully, it will be a summer of sunny days, strawberries and cream at Wimbledon, cricket at Lords and elsewhere—indeed, the test series starts later this week—and holidays and pleasure for most people. Regrettably, residents in parts of my constituency look forward to summer with a somewhat different attitude and some misgivings. Inevitably, in parts of my constituency, as in parts of many others, the summer brings an invasion of one of the greatest scourges of modern time: the new age traveller or gipsy.

There is nothing romantic about such people, despite the fact that they hide behind a fairly romantic title. The House will know that very few, if any, people would have any objection to those who choose a nomadic form of life that is honourable and respectable and goes back many generations—not only in this country but throughout the

world—on the basis that Romany families and the genuine traveller or gipsy, as he was then known, is part of our history.

Regrettably, that romantic image has been shattered by several hundred and possibly thousands of people who decide basically to opt out of society and the responsibilities which the majority of the population abide by and accept, to follow a way of life that is an infernal nuisance, especially during the summer months, to those in and around the countryside and, unfortunately, also in our towns.

The travellers are, on the whole, a dirty and aggressive set of people with strong criminal links. They present a health hazard when they arrive on a site and leave a rather worse health hazard when they go. They are scroungers in the worst sense of the word, in that they willingly take every state benefit available to them, and, indeed, to other citizens. They are probably the most uninvited of guests whom no one would wish to see in and around his area.

A constituent, Mr. Armstrong, wrote to me last year when we had a particular problem in Luton. His words are worth recording and will, I am sure, strike a chord with hon. Members on both sides of the House. Mr. Armstrong writes:

"We are all very disturbed by the recent High Court ruling regarding 'travellers'."

I shall come to that matter later. Mr. Armstrong continues:

"It is all very well claiming rights but in having rights there are also obligations. Also someone has to pay for rights and it would seem that 'travellers' avoid the liability of making any payment.

They contribute nothing to the wellbeing of an area—quite the reverse. They cause disturbances, always leave a mess behind and usually cause a health hazard by using some part of their area as a lavatory. They regard the land as theirs by right and have been known to tell residents to 'get off our'"—

there is now an expletive which I am not allowed to repeat—

"'land.' After they have left, the local authority has to clear up the site at the council taxpayers' expense. If they want rights they should pay for them."

These people are a trouble when they come and a trouble when they go. Only last year, in a very respectable part of my constituency—all parts of my constituency are very respectable, but this area may be a little more genteel than others—it fell to the local vicar to act. Here one can perhaps applaud some of the Church's actions, which it has been difficult to do over the past few years. He got together a band of helpers to clear up the mess that the travellers had left adjacent to people's homes.

At 10 am on Saturday 22 July last year, the vicar and his friends circulated in the Bushmead area of my constituency a leaflet which urged people to

"join us at the tractor and trailer on the common."

The vicar offered free refreshment vouchers for the first 50 helpers and—this is the rub—the leaflet said:

"Gloves will be provided . . . This may be a dirty and hazardous job. You may help clear up at your own risk."

These people are enjoying the protection of the law and, possibly unwittingly, of local authorities. They are an enormous nuisance to our constituents. This is just the time of year when they begin to arrive. We have already had problems with them in the Luton area, and I am fearful that we shall suffer a further invasion during the summer months.

Mr. David Nicholson: My hon. Friend assisted me with my speech by giving an example from my constituency. Perhaps I can assist him with his speech by giving another example from my constituency.

Last week, the Liberal Democrat-controlled Somerset county council passed various provisions to assist new age travellers in Somerset. It was attacked by Conservative opposition councillors who said that it would make Somerset a honeypot for travellers because no other county council—most county councils in the area are Liberal Democrat, Labour or jointly controlled—has taken such measures. My hon. Friend may like to reflect on that point and relate it to begging and to the housing matters that I raised earlier.

Mr. Carlisle: Indeed. My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge. He represents an area that has suffered more than most from new age travellers. Around Stonehenge, there have been raves and all that goes with them, to which I shall refer later. My hon. Friend is right to point out to the House that there are local authorities, controlled by the Liberal Democrats or, in my case, by Labour, which seem to wish to give comfort and succour to these people, much to the distress of nearby residents.

The travellers cost us an enormous amount. They know about the state benefits and they insist on taking them. In my hon. Friend's area, they travel in such numbers that they take with them experts on social security who know exactly which benefits are available. Indeed, things have come to the point that officials from the local benefits office often visit sites, ensuring that travellers claim the rights to which they believe they are entitled. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House had long experience in the Department of Social Security. He will know only too well the problem I am talking about.

New age travellers also cost local authorities and individuals an enormous amount in terms of legal fees, which run to several hundreds of thousands of pounds, if not more, throughout the country. They cost the council time and resources in removing them and removing the mess. They cost the local taxpayer an enormous amount in terms of police costs because in most cases, the police are involved when the travellers arrive. There is also the enormous cost of clearing up the damage and mess they leave once they have gone.

Some might say that these travellers are almost above the law. I must tell my right hon. Friend that I am somewhat disturbed by the fact that, although we passed the massive Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, part of which had the specific purpose of dealing with this problem, the guidance from the Department of the Environment does not reflect that fact. I have discussed this personally with the Ministers involved. The Department's attitude has been tolerant rather than, as it should be, somewhat vindictive.

In recent correspondence, my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency talks about genuine travellers and how local authorities must be reasonable with them, especially in terms of not harrying them too much to leave if their vehicles have broken down and allowing them time to mend them. Every right-thinking citizen fully understands that that is just one of the many and varied methods these people use to prevent others from moving them. I must confess that I am somewhat disturbed to hear the Government almost giving these people help and succour.

[Mr. Carlisle]

The travellers also seem to be protected by the courts. Recent High Court decisions, which are referred to in the letter from my constituents, the Armstrongs, which I quoted earlier, gave the travellers greater protection and prevented local authorities, in some cases, from ridding their areas of this nuisance. In a recent case, Lincolnshire county council's decision to try to remove travellers was overturned in the High Court. The travellers also enjoy protection under the Children Act 1989, under education legislation and under housing legislation, which my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) mentioned.

One begins to realise that for some travellers, it is not a bad life. People opt out into a caravan or vehicle of some sort and park on somebody else's land in the full knowledge that they will be able to stay there almost as long as they choose. Their children will have every protection under the law in terms of education and health care. If members of the tribe—I think that that is probably the best description of them—are expecting a child, heaps of help is given and no one can touch them.

In certain areas, according to reports, police forces are very reluctant to act, both because of the costs involved and because they know that, whenever these people arrive, there will be trouble. In many cases, that involves physical violence against officers of the council who try to move the travellers on and against individuals who remonstrate with them about their behaviour, often in their own gardens and on their own land. The police have been somewhat reluctant to go forward—possibly, again, because Home Office guidance has not been as strong as it might be.

All that has happened since the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is that local authorities are now hiding behind the statement that—since the Caravan Sites Act 1968 was repealed, whereby authorities were bound to provide sites for gipsies if they were a problem in their area—there is very little they can do about the problem, because they cannot move them on to sites.

The trouble in my constituency came to a head last year, to such an extent that a petition of 1,200 names was presented to the council to try to ensure that some action was taken against the gipsies. Bollards were erected in one area to prevent them from going on to private land, but they had to be removed because of a right-of-way problem during a local by-election. Obviously, a way was then open for them to go in.

The estimate of cost to the Luton council taxpayer last year was £60,000. I think that that was an underestimate of what we had to pay to move the gipsies on, and in getting rid of them altogether.

The cost of such actions to private landowners is considerable. It costs up to, and probably exceeds, £2,000 in legal fees to go through the proper process to get people off land on which they have absolutely no right to stay. Not the least cost is the misery and fear that those people cause to nearby residents, who are unfortunate enough to live in areas that have wide and open fields beside them, which would normally be an asset to their property. They now live in fear that travellers will appear, usually during the summer months, to make life a misery for them.

The travellers are almost above the law. Some two or three years ago, I was faced with a similar problem in another part of my constituency. I objected to them being there, and, on behalf of my constituents in the village of Harlington, said that I did not think that they were in a suitable place for a site. As my hon. Friends may know, my language then was perhaps somewhat extravagant, because I was cross and angry on my constituents' behalf.

I received a letter from the Commission for Racial Equality stating that I was stirring up trouble, and asked whether I would appear at a magistrates court about a week or so later to answer those charges. That was in relation to a Member of Parliament performing his duty on behalf of his constituents, who perhaps unwittingly expressed his opinion outside the confines of this place.

Fortunately, the Commission for Racial Equality dropped the charges, which were then taken up by the Crown Prosecution Service on the basis that I should be prosecuted because of those—I thought somewhat mild—remarks suggesting that the gipsies should be driven out of my constituency, into a land I do not know where. Luckily, after various police investigations—costing an enormous amount of money to them and legal fees to me—the case was dropped. Again, perhaps that gives the House an idea why some might feel that those people are above the law.

That is where the problem lies. As I said earlier, we quite rightly passed a massive Act in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which, among many other excellent measures, was designed to try to prevent the problem of raves, hunt saboteurs and gipsies. We have had problems in my area with raves. I think that the Act, on the whole, has worked quite well, and there has been some control over those.

On hunt saboteurs—I talk as an unashamed supporter of field sports and as a member of the British Field Sports Society—there is no doubt that the Act has been a considerable bonus to those of us who enjoy country sports. The hunt saboteurs' activities have been considerably reduced because of the Act. On gipsies, however, I must tell my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that the action in overturning the 1968 Act and giving local authorities new powers has been a complete disappointment.

The 1994 Act has brought its own problems, such as problems of identification: one must now identify people to get them moved on. Apart from saying that their name is Smith—which in Luton is, of course, almost an unusual name, with so many friends now of ethnic origin—as most of them do, identification is extremely difficult.

There are also difficulties with changing numbers of people, now that magistrates' warnings must be laid at the foot of individuals rather than at the foot of groups of people. Once one individual receives a court order, and possibly moves on—but, in many cases, stays and waits his full time—others move on to the same site. There are obviously difficulties there.

There are difficulties also with police action. The police have been told to use their powers in a discretionary manner. Local authorities are inevitably asking the police to back them up, because those people are often vicious and violent, and the public need to be protected from them. There are dangers to council staff who are asked to go on to those sites to ask people to move. They ask them to move in as civil a manner as they can, while receiving abuse, and sometimes physical intimidation.

There are also difficulties with the Act in that it allows fines of up to £1,000, which of course are totally laughed at by those on whom they are levied. I tell my right hon.

Friend the Leader of the House that, in his consultations with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, he must point out to him following this debate that, under section 77 of the 1994 Act, there are many and various difficulties. Local councils across the country are now saying that this law is defective in terms of their needs. A recent survey of the Association of District Councils showed that 89 per cent. of councils thought that the law was inadequate, ineffective and "poor" in addressing their problems.

There are now, of course, difficulties in that designated areas have ceased. In Luton we have one designated area left over from the old legislation, which is still not full but is available for gipsies to be moved on to. The difficulty now is that local authorities are almost saying, "Perhaps we should have more designated areas because of our problems and the ineffectiveness of the law." That, again, is causing problems.

Again reflecting the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton, that response is a cop-out, which Labour-controlled councils are beginning to go for. They are saying, "We have this problem; therefore, we will designate another area and have another site in the town." The difficulty then is: where does that site go? Inevitably it must go into an open space; and, wherever it goes, there will be a problem. Labour-controlled authorities are not standing up to the problem, and are not being strong enough; but, obviously, I have some sympathy with the difficulties that they face.

My own council is now boasting that it will shortly be proposing a new site, and other local authorities are watching it to see what it will do. If the Labour-controlled council in Luton puts another site into the Luton area, there will be massive resistance—quite rightly so—from the constituents. Again as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton said, Luton could become a honeypot for those who feel that they have nowhere else to go, because that is the life they have chosen. It will attract more travellers into the town rather than to dissuade them. I think that the Labour-controlled authority is totally wrong on this issue, and massive opposition is building up in the constituency against it.

Today, my message to the House and to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—and, in turn, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—is that this law has not proved effective. The Department has promised that it will examine the law and monitor its effectiveness. It is a fact that it is not working. Some of the guidance and advice that the Department has given is flawed, and it has not taken the strong attitude that I believe the majority of Conservative Members want—bearing in mind that most of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 was vehemently opposed by Opposition Members, a fact which must never be forgotten when they boast about how effective they are on law and order.

There is no doubt at all that this law is worth re-examining. The attitude of the police needs to be re-examined, on the basis that they seem to be almost reluctant to act in these cases. They must go in not with velvet but with iron gloves to sort out the problem. I think that council action has to be re-examined, particularly in cases in which Labour-controlled councils, such as that in Luton, are hiding behind the law, putting in extra sites and making it attractive for those people to carry on their way of life.

I fear that the problem may get worse as the summer wears on, and we must remember that the victims of this sorry tale are the people—our constituents. I told my constituents at a public meeting the other day that, in addition to the power of the ballot box—they elect their Member of Parliament—they have the power to lobby that Member of Parliament and their local councillors to try to rid their area and, we hope, the country of these unwanted people. We must look carefully at the laws we have passed, and strengthen them with some force.

11.9 am

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I shall try to observe what I understood to be the custom in these debates and make a fairly brief speech on one or two urgent matters that require the attention of the House. There is little Government legislation to debate but there is certainly much unfinished business to be considered.

The first matter that I wish to raise will, I believe, be dear to your heart, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it relates to an incident in Yorkshire as reported in today's press. It involves Mr. and Mrs. Milnes, whose car was wheelclamped and removed. They were told that it would cost £450 to have it returned and an extra £20 for each day that payment was delayed. The total now seems to have risen to £1,000. Such licensed robbery and banditry has been allowed to continue for far too long. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has been investigating incidents in the Digbeth area of Birmingham, where cars are left on empty sites to entice unwary parkers whose cars are subsequently clamped—sometimes even with their owners in them.

Let me make it clear that I am not talking about clamping by the official authorities in London of cars parked on the street but about off-street clamping carried out by private operators, many of whom are extremely dubious. The penalty being imposed by such operators—£95 to have the car released and £450 to have it returned after it had been towed away—is way in excess of those imposed under the law for illegal parking on the street. Furthermore, clampers are acting as judge, jury and enforcer. In many ways, the word "enforcer" is apposite.

The Government's delay in acting has been scandalous. It is more than three years since the Home Office finished its consultation on clamping on private land. The Minister of State, Home Office has continued to dither and delay and will not propose a solution, despite the fact that, since a ruling by the Scottish High Court four years ago, private wheelclamping has been illegal in Scotland. That has not led to a breakdown of parking controls. The Home Office should introduce legislation urgently so that companies such as LORE clampers based in Leeds are no longer able to intimidate decent ordinary citizens.

Another matter that has come into focus this week and requires urgent legislation is the funding of political parties—in particular allegations made at the weekend of donations by Serb business men to the Conservative party. In the previous four Sessions, I have introduced a private Member's Bill to try to regulate the funding of political parties. My most recent attempt was on 19 April and it is a fairly modest proposal. It would ban foreign donations to political parties and provide for a register of donations of more than £1,000. Had the Bill been law, *The Sunday Times* would not have had to make inquiries about

[Mr. John Spellar]

donations; it would have been able to read the register and ascertain who had been contributing to the Conservative party.

The Government's reluctance to introduce legislation or, as suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) yesterday, to refer the matter to the Nolan committee must lead us and right-thinking people outside to believe that, if those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear, the Conservative party must accordingly have a good deal to hide and a good deal to fear. I have written to the Leader of the House, asking for parliamentary time to be made available to debate my modest proposal, which would be regarded as quite unremarkable in most other western democracies.

I refer now to the continuing saga of the millennium exhibition. I do not want to get involved in the basic question whether there should be a major millennium exhibition, but, as the decision has been made, let us consider the choice of location. The final choice was narrowed down to two possible locations—Greenwich in London and Birmingham.

Birmingham has the experience of operating a large site—the national exhibition centre—and handling huge numbers of people. It had a site available and ready for construction. It also has the personal infrastructure in the form of NEC staff, and equally important—possibly even more important—the transport infrastructure. Birmingham is situated at the junction of Britain's motorway network and has an international railway station and a major and expanding airport. Birmingham also had the group, Imagination, draw up plans for the exhibition. The plans were so good that, when the Government decided to take the scheme to London, they asked Imagination to take over the running and planning of it.

All those factors should have weighed in favour of Birmingham yet it was decided that the London bid should have priority, even though it was unclear where the London funding was to come from. The Birmingham scheme was properly funded but there was great uncertainty about the London scheme—a fact borne out by events as company after company has bailed out of funding the scheme. Indeed, extension after extension has had to be given to London while it tries to get its act together.

The only conclusion that reasonable people can come to—especially people in the midlands—is that the decision was made by the cultural establishment, based on its unremitting metropolitan bias and its refusal to consider sound, sensible and workable schemes outside London because it does not want to travel to Birmingham or elsewhere.

I suspect that the decision was also related to the long-term ambitions of the Deputy Prime Minister to expand London along the estuary. We witnessed another example of that bias in yesterday's report by the Select Committee on Transport, which examined the possibility of an estuary airport for London instead of considering the expansion of regional airports.

The millennium scheme is now in crisis. The months are ticking by but not one sod of earth has been turned. Indeed, construction cannot start until the Greenwich site has been decontaminated. The time scale crisis is partly the result of the Government's lack of forward planning and their not making decisions sufficiently early so that there was time to get the construction under way. Incidentally, the same appears to be happening with the commemoration of the bicentenary of Trafalgar day—preparations will be put off until the event is upon us.

The problem is that Greenwich was the wrong choice and we have daily proof of that. The Millennium Commission should recognise that it has made a mistake. It should not, as reported in the press, be talking petulantly about scrapping the scheme. Instead, it should be talking about giving the project to the one area that will bring it in on time and make it a success—Birmingham.

Finally in this connection, there is some uncertainty about what will be done with the millennium exhibition buildings on the Greenwich site. In Birmingham, such buildings would become part of an integrated NEC. It would do much for Britain and for areas outside London if the correct choice was made.

The midlands is also home to a considerable section of the Sikh community, which has made an enormous contribution to the industry and commerce of this country. That community will shortly be remembering the appalling attack by Indian security forces on the Golden temple in Amritsar. It will be an opportunity for them to express their deep concern at the continuing abuse of human rights in the Punjab. Such abuse consists of disappearances, torture and the arbitrary arrest of citizens and the removal of their civil rights. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office should raise this issue with our Commonwealth partners in the Government of India, and must state our belief that human rights should be restored as soon as possible.

11.19 am

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), who suggested that the millennium celebrations should take place in Birmingham. As a Member representing a London constituency, he will not be surprised to learn that I do not agree with him. London is a mecca for tourism, and if the celebrations are designed partly to attract people from other parts of the United Kingdom and from overseas, London is a far more logical choice than Birmingham. In 1951, the then Government decided to hold the Festival of Britain on the south bank rather than in the midlands.

Mr. Tony Banks: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marshall: On this occasion, the hon. Gentleman and I form a holy alliance. We represent the city of London, our tourist capital. If the celebrations are held in London, they will be of great benefit to the whole country. I suspect that if they were to be held in Birmingham, they would receive much less support from the people of this country and from overseas.

Earlier this week, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development had to revise its economic forecasts for this year and next year. It pointed out to the people of Europe that the provisions of the Maastricht treaty were squeezing growth out of the economies of continental Europe, particularly those of France and Germany, which are obsessed with creating a single currency by 1999.

Britain is in the fortunate position of having the strongest economy in western Europe. We can look forward to good growth this year and next year, and the Bank of England has confirmed that the Government's inflation targets are being achieved. We have much lower unemployment than other European countries, and we have received significant inward investment. That is not due to some accident of history.

We can all recall the magic words of Jacques Delors during the Maastricht discussions, who forecast that the fact that Britain was exempt from the social chapter would act as a magnet for inward investment. I do not often quote the former President of the European Commission with approval—nor does my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), the Whip on the Front Bench—but on this occasion he was 100 per cent. right. If we were to reverse the policies that attracted companies to the United Kingdom, we could say goodbye to inward investment, low unemployment and the rapid economic growth that is enabling the Government to improve our social services.

Earlier this week, a number of hon. Members were able to meet the parents of an Israeli, Zachary Baumel, who went missing in Lebanon in 1982. His parents have no idea what has happened to him, although there are suggestions that he is still alive. Surely any parent has a right to know after 14 years what has happened to his or her son. Some of us have met the mother, brothers, wife and daughter of another missing Israeli, Ron Arad, who was captured nearly 10 years ago. He will shortly have spent a longer time in captivity than the duration of the first and second world wars. It is surely wrong that any prisoner of war should have to spend 10 years in captivity without being allowed to send or receive letters for most of that time.

When Mr. Arad was captured, his daughter was a year old. What sort of people prevent a young girl from seeing her father between the ages of one and 11? What sort of captors prevent a prisoner of war from receiving letters? What sort of people prevent a man from being with his wife for 10 years? What sort of people prevent an elderly mother from seeing her eldest son? That is what is happening in the middle east to the Arad family and to the parents of Zachary Baumel.

It is ironic that Israel kick-started the release of western hostages in the middle east by allowing many Palestinian prisoners to leave prisons in Israel and go to other countries, but Israel has received no reward for that humanitarian act. The parents of the Israelis who are missing in action do not know what has happened to their sons, who may still be alive. Some believe that Zachary Baumel is alive, and there is evidence that Ron Arad is still alive.

When Mr. Arafat visits Britain shortly—no doubt to ask for money—the Government should ask him to provide information to the parents of the missing Israelis. The failure to do so is an international scandal and a fundamental denial of human rights.

The most pressing problems facing the United Kingdom are the low education standards, achievements and—in some places—expectations in our inner cities. In London, many children aged 11 have a reading age of nine. Education is the escalator of opportunity that allows children from deprived inner cities to live, work and use their talents to the fullest elsewhere. If the education services in inner London fail to give children the basic building blocks of a decent education—the ability to read, spell and add up—we will fail a whole generation. The late and unlamented Inner London education authority failed to provide those building blocks. The results for inner London that have been published, thank goodness, by the Government show that it is a national scandal. I hope that the Government will continue their policies of ensuring that the basics of education are taught.

If we do not teach the basics of education in our primary schools, it will make it almost impossible for the head teachers of secondary schools to enable children to develop their talents fully. Everyone supports the Government's policies to make secondary education more diverse, and everyone welcomes the announcements made yesterday by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, but it is essential that we examine the basics of education in our primary schools to ensure that children are not deprived of their basic right—the ability to read, write and add up.

An issue raised at Question Time on Monday, which will no doubt be raised from time to time, is the problem of the legal aid fund. Under this Government, expenditure on legal aid—*[Interruption.]* I see that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) is about to leave. Expenditure on legal aid has risen from £100 million to about £1.5 billion. Many of us are concerned that the legal aid fund is providing funding for cases that should not be funded by the taxpayer.

For example, in what is known as the Sony case a German resident sued Sony in the British courts over a patent dispute. The German had no intention of living in this country or paying a deutschmark in British tax, but he received £500,000 in legal aid from the British taxpayer. Some hon. Members will have seen in the *Daily Mail* on Saturday that an old Etonian received £200,000 in legal aid while suing Clifford Chance, a well-known firm of solicitors.

Many of us are concerned about the fact that worthless cases are being financed by the taxpayer. Many of us are concerned about the fact that overseas residents can obtain money to fight cases in British courts when they will never pay any British tax. Many of us are concerned about the fact that the legally aided party in a civil case has an advantage over the other party. It is, after all, extremely rare, when a legally aided litigant loses a case, for the legal aid fund to pay the costs of the successful party. That is unfair: one party knows that the case can continue and he will not have to pay anything towards his costs, while the other knows that if he loses he will pay the other party's costs, and if he wins he will have to pay his own.

I believe that, when the legal aid fund backs a case and that case is unsuccessful, it should then pay the costs of the successful party. At present, we are placing an unfair burden on those who are fighting legally aided litigants.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I agree with all that. May I go now?

Mr. Marshall: I wonder what the fee will be for my hon. and learned Friend's opinion.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Substantial.

Mr. Marshall: I fear that my hon. Friend may be right.

[Mr. Marshall]

It is traditional for one or two local issues to be raised in debates such as this. Let me mention some that are of concern to my constituents. One is the London fire and civil defence authority's recommendation that fire cover in the capital should be reduced, although its finance director has told it that its reserves of £27 million are too high. Surely it is wrong for the authority—dominated as it is by the Labour and Liberal parties—to recommend a reduction in fire cover in London, and in my constituency in particular, when it has been told that its reserves are too high. Those reserves should not be stashed away, no doubt in an attempt to produce a lower council tax rate in election year in London; they should be used now, to provide fire cover for my constituents and those of other London Members.

Let me raise two more local issues. One concerns the future of an institution called College farm—an oasis in north London that is deeply loved by my constituents and those of other Barnet Members. It is visited by many thousands of children and others each month, but the Department of Transport has decided that it is surplus to requirements. I hope that, when he decides its fate, my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London will heed the representations of thousands of my constituents and thousands of other people in Barnet, and the campaign run by the *Hendon and Finchley Times*, and allow the farm to remain a farm rather than being sold for commercial or residential development.

Finally, let me briefly raise an issue that concerns many residents of the London borough of Barnet. It will not surprise my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to learn that I refer to developments at Edgware hospital. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) for the way in which he has led the parliamentary campaign. He has tabled a parliamentary question on the issue, which is to be answered on 6 June.

Barnet health authority has suggested that the minor accident and treatment unit that it wants on the site should operate for only 12 hours a day. I feel that that proposal should be re-examined. It is unacceptable to the people of Barnet, to those whom I represent and to people elsewhere that there should not continue to be a medical presence at the hospital to deal with all the cases that currently go to the accident and emergency department. Hon. Members such as my hon. Friends the Members for Finchley (Mr. Booth) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) will want to return to that issue when the House reconvenes in June, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be able to give the people of Barnet good news rather than bad.

11.34 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I was waiting for the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) to get round to the Schleswig-Holstein question. Next time he wishes to raise 10 issues, perhaps he will bring out a little book and we can all buy it when it is duly remaindered.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Gentleman referred to the choice of London as the millennium site. As he rightly supposed, I agree with him about that, but the way in which the choice was made does not befit the millennium and the way in which we should celebrate it. The Greenwich site still looks like a bomb site; no wonder hon. Members representing constituencies outside London are complaining so bitterly. I might point out to the hon. Gentleman that, if we had had a strategic authority in London, all the dithering over the development of the site would not have happened—but we shall return to that anon.

I wish to raise two issues. The first relates to the vexed problem of Norway's resumption of commercial whaling yesterday. Early-day motion 889, which appears on today's Order Paper and has so far been signed by 143 hon. Members from all parties, refers to Norway's decision to slaughter some 425 minke whales, as well as an unspecified number for what it refers to as scientific whaling purposes. That decision was made in defiance of the International Whaling Commission. Norway declared a unilateral resumption of commercial minke whaling in 1993, but the IWC rates the minke whale as a protected species. Minke whales are migratory creatures, and they belong to us all; they certainly do not belong to Norway.

I will not tax the House by describing the method of destruction, but a penthrite grenade is fired into the body of the whale and then explodes, releasing a huge volume of gas and inflicting enormous pain and suffering. When the whales do not die swiftly—within, say, 10 seconds—Norwegian whalers finish them off with large hunting rifles. That is barbarous, and it is scandalous that it should done by a neighbouring country with which we have close relations. When I raised the matter during business questions, the Leader of the House said that he would protest, or at least pass on the comments that were made—not just my comments, but those of all 143 Members of Parliament—to the Norwegian authorities. I hope that he will tell us exactly what he has done.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My hon. Friend has pursued this matter diligently, both here and in Strasbourg, where Mrs. Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister, boasted that half the whales had died instantly. We pointed out that the other half had not.

Mr. Banks: That, too, was an all-party attack on Gro Harlem Brundtland, which resulted in her complaining to the then leader of the Labour party that she had been attacked by a fellow socialist. I feel ashamed to describe Gro Harlem Brundtland as a socialist—particularly one who goes around the world boasting of her green credentials, and saying that Norway is at the cutting edge of environmental and ecological concern. That is rank hypocrisy, and I cannot wait to tell Mrs. Brundtland so again next time our paths cross.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), very appropriately, raised the question of how long it takes whales to die. Whales are sentient beings—sensitive creatures with a social grouping system. They have feelings, many of which we do not fully understand. We should be studying these marvellous creatures, not slaughtering them for whale meat and blubber, much of which ends up on plates in Tokyo. It is unnecessary, and it is done mercilessly.

Let me inform my hon. Friend that, in Norway's 1995 catch, according to Norwegian records 62 per cent. of whales were killed instantly, 11 per cent. were still alive after 10 minutes and 4 per cent. were still alive after

15 minutes. The average time for death was three minutes 24 seconds and the longest recorded time was nothing less that 43 minutes and 20 seconds. Unfortunately, in many cases, the whales were pregnant, so the infant was killed as well as the cow. It is monstrous that that is being done by a European nation—or by any nation. The strongest possible protest must go out.

What is the result? According to the Norwegian figures, the 1995 catch resulted in the landing of 327.5 tonnes of meat worth 10 million Norwegian krona, which is about £1 million. All that suffering for £1 million—it seems monstrous.

I raise that matter because the plenary session of the IWC takes place in Aberdeen on 24 June. I hope that as many people as possible will be there to protest against the Norwegians' conduct and defiance of the IWC. They must be in no doubt about the intense anger throughout this country—not just in Parliament—about the way in which the Norwegians are flouting the international whaling convention.

The second issue relates to dogs. Yesterday, the Prime Minister cried havoc and unleashed the dogs of war. I found many aspects of that surreal. The one thing about declaring war and delivering an ultimatum is that one must ensure that one has an escape route, and I do not think that the Prime Minister has. I do not intend to go into the matter too deeply, but it seems entirely appropriate to me that we should go to war over semen; it is an appropriate thing for a Government of onanists to go to war over.

I want to concentrate on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which was a rotten piece of legislation. It was passed in haste. I remember standing in this very spot to warn the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who has now moved on to other things. The warnings were ignored. Everything was done in a rush. There was a public reaction, we legislated in haste and we are now repenting at some leisure.

The operation of the 1991 Act defies common sense and denies normal and compassionate treatment for animals and human beings alike. We all know why it came about—because of the attacks by pit bull terriers. Section 1 of the Act defines a pit bull terrier, but it is a confused definition. At times, one does not know what such a terrier is, as so many crosses are involved. Under section 10(3), dangerous dog activity might merely be threat or intimidation. No actual damage may be inflicted on a human being, but the Act can be brought into operation if someone feels intimidated by a dog. The Act is confused and imprecise.

Court cases are costing an average of £10,000 and an enormous amount of police time is involved. None of that makes sense. The courts have no discretion on sentencing, other than to order the destruction of the dog. We should not be proud of that. The Act has taken any discretion on the part of magistrates away, which does not seem fair in law and certainly is not fair to the dogs and their owners. It has resulted in appalling cases of suffering and heartache for dogs and owners. I know of thousands of examples of the way in which the Act has operated, but I shall give only two.

The first example relates to Mr. Bates and his dog Otis. In 1992, the police stopped him on the motorway—there was a dog in his car. The court decided that Mr. Bates' car was a public place. He appealed, but the High Court also decided that it was a public place and that Mr. Bates should have had a muzzle and a lead on the dog while he was driving. That shows the level of absurdity that we have reached under the Act. He appealed and went to the European Court, but was turned down and Otis was destroyed on the same day as the IRA exploded a bomb in docklands. That was an absurd case, and the legislation is absurd.

The second case is still before the Home Secretary and concerns Jessie—an inoffensive, toothless dog, thought to be suffering from motor neurone disease. When Jessie was found by Southwark Crown court to be a type of pit bull terrier and condemned to die in June 1995, she had never put a paw wrong. When she was brought before the court, the judges removed their wigs in case they frightened her. In court, she limped pathetically and dragged her left leg because she is lame. Indeed, there were tears in the court room. That was the last time that her owner saw Jessie and it was a painful scene for anyone to behold.

Jessie had accidentally been lost in Hyde park when her owner, Mr. O'Brien, had had an argument with his girlfriend and they had gone their separate ways. The dog is suffering from paralysis of the lower limbs and clearly needs to live out what is left of its life in some sort of comfort, but is still on dog death row. People have been writing to the Home Secretary about the case. Even though a destruction order has been made under the Dangerous Dogs Act, it does not state when it has to be implemented, so Jessie could be allowed to live out what few days she has left. The Home Secretary can make a judgment and could even exercise clemency if he so wished.

I hope that when the Leader of the House sums up, he will tell us what he can do about that case, as I think that today is the last day for any form of appeal or stay of execution to be allowed for Jessie. It is a pathetic case and it demonstrates that if we legislate so rapidly, we are likely to make big mistakes. I am sure that the Leader of the House will find that there is agreement for amendments to the Act on both sides of the House and that those could be passed very quickly indeed. There is good will on both sides of the House on the matter, and I hope that he will give us an opportunity to demonstrate that good will, because he will be thanked not just by hon. Members, but by dog owners and dog lovers throughout the country.

11.46 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): A number of hon. Members have referred to the millennium location at Greenwich. I want to add my support. I am not a London Member of Parliament, but my constituents look forward to that improvement of the Greenwich site, which has good access to the entire country, as it is close to the Blackwall tunnel and the motorways connecting to it to the north and south. The site is of particular interest to my constituents as it is right alongside the River Thames, so there will be river access for tourists and those visiting from central London. More important to me, there will also be direct river access from the port of Gravesend in my constituency.

The House should not rise for the Whitsun recess without considering the over-government of the people of Kent and of so many other counties. This weekend, we read of the Labour party's national policy forum in Manchester, which decided to impose regional

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

government on England without even the benefit of a referendum. For my constituents in Kent, that would mean yet another tier of government—this one located at the far end of Surrey, in Guildford. For Kent people, that would mean more politicians, more bureaucracy and more tax.

In many ways, this country is already one of the most over-governed in the world. We have the European level, the fount of power here at Westminster with its adjunct in Whitehall, the county councils—in our case, county hall, Maidstone—the borough councils—in our case, the borough of Gravesham—and the rural parish councils. The Labour party is proposing to add a regional government, based in Guildford.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen) *rose—*

Mr. Arnold: I will not give way as I want to press on with this argument.

A quick calculation shows that that means that Labour proposes six levels of government. The result will be paralysis, complexity and a field day for lawyers. I shall briefly consider each level.

The beef ban has shown the European level at its worst. The morass of bureaucracy and committees in Europe has impaled it well and truly on a meathook from which it cannot escape. Despite the best scientific advice to the European Commission, which has assimilated it and put proposals to the standing veterinary committee, the committee cannot get off the hook. It has imposed all sorts of disastrous restrictions.

What sort of voice do we have in Europe? This is the most serious crisis to affect the people of Kent for many years. Kent has many beef farmers and other people who are involved in trades linked to the beef industry. We have not heard a squeak from the two Labour Members of the European Parliament who are supposed to represent Kent in Strasbourg. They have said nothing either in Strasbourg or in Kent. They are too busy enjoying the gravy train that Strasbourg seems to have become.

We heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) of the consequences for the British people of European policies. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) gave chapter and verse on how the so-called European Court of Justice is steadily extending the powers of European institutions way beyond what was envisaged in the treaties that were signed and approved by the House. The European level is costly, bureaucratic and a drag on my constituents.

At county council level, my constituents resent the remote county hall in Maidstone. This year, the Liberal Democrat and Labour coalition that runs it has imposed a 5.6 per cent. increase in council tax—way above inflation. What have we got for that increase? There has been no such increase in the resources available for schools and the council conducts trench warfare against Kent's numerous grant-maintained schools. Rural roads are inadequately repaired; potholes and ruts such as we have not seen for many a year are appearing because the Lib-Lab pact does not give that a high enough priority. There is also the shambles in the road programme, but I have not the time to consider that now.

Gravesham borough council, no doubt under instructions from its Labour party headquarters, had to raise its council tax despite the fact that it did not need any more money. My constituents may be interested to learn that its reserves contain £1,000 for each of the 37,000 households in the borough. Yet it had the gall to ask my constituents for an increase in their council tax. Finally, there are the parish councils, which I strongly support because they are in many ways closest to the people, the most directly responsible and the least expensive.

Despite all those levels and the paralysis, the Labour party wants to impose regional councils on England. How would that affect my constituents? A regional council would be run from Guildford, miles away on the other side of London. We already resent that so many local government services are run from county hall in Maidstone. The idea of Guildford is a joke.

What will regional councils do? We have not been told, because the Labour party does not tell us the details of its policies. It has not got round to deciding what services such councils will provide. Will they take powers from borough or county councils? Will they run the schools or colleges from Guildford? We have an excellent college—the North West Kent college of technology, which is doing well under local autonomy. Would they suddenly decide to run that from Guildford? Would they manage the roads from there?

Will regional councils take control of the local NHS? I congratulate the Government on dismantling tiers of government in the NHS. In the past few years alone, we have got rid of the vast top-hamper of the regional health authority at Bexhill, with its masses of bureaucrats who used up money. We have got rid of the district health authority with its bureaucracy at the Darenth park site. Has anyone noticed that we have lost those tiers of the NHS and therefore been able to redeploy the money to care for the health of our constituents? No one noticed them go any more than people noticed when the Greater London council went. People no longer have to watch the antics of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), but no services for the people of London disappeared.

We know that the Labour party favours reversing the NHS reforms, even though we have local management through the NHS trusts and power is in the hands of the GPs, who serve the public either through fundholding practices, which have been a great success, or by purchasing through the health authorities, in my case from West Kent health authority, which respond to GPs' needs. I do not think that a new NHS tier at Guildford would do anything for my constituents except absorb vast sums of money that would otherwise go into their health care.

We have not heard from the Labour party what regional government would do, but we can be sure that it would have a full set of councillors who would exercise Parkinson's law and create more bureaucracy and interference. What would it cost? Of course, the Labour party will not tell us. It would be immensely expensive, but it will not say how it will pay for it. Will it be by an additional levy on the council tax or a purchase tax on local people? How will it raise the money? It will not say, but we know that regional government imposed by the Labour party will mean more tax or the diversion of funds away from education and the social and other services that we want.

I do not believe that the people of England want regional government—we already have too much government. Why then, does Labour propose it? It is because of its rash proposal for an assembly for Scotland, which would involve more politicians and a tartan tax. That proposal is important to the House because Scotland is consciously over-represented here. If there were an assembly in Scotland, there would be no justification for that over-representation. Indeed, there would be a strong argument for under-representation. The Labour party will not face up to that fact because, to get a majority in the House, it would depend on Scottish Members. We have had no response to the West Lothian question raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Labour is imposing regional government on England to offset the West Lothian question.

Labour's plan is not new—it has been a long-term plot. In responding to that and the problem of having six tiers of government, the Labour party set the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to work to knock out as many county councils as he could. On two separate occasions, speaking for the Labour party at the Dispatch Box, he proposed the abolition of Kent county council. The trouble is that he did not speak to his party about it. The Labour party group on Kent county council spent £1 million of council tax payers' money to fight the abolition proposal. Gravesham borough council's Labour party did a spectacular U-turn to oppose it. I suspect that it opposed abolition of the county council because it never expected to run either council; it runs them now, and two Labour leaders into one council does not go.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras tried to get rid of Kent county council and failed. He had to report to the party leadership that he had failed, but Labour will go ahead anyway; if it has to impose six tiers of government on the people of Kent and elsewhere in the country, it will be happy to do so. Labour originally said that it would do so with the proviso that a referendum be held before any regional council was set up in England.

I understand that, over the weekend, Labour has backed away from the referendum proposal, and we do not need to look far to see why it did so, because regional councils in England are immensely unpopular. We understand, from reports in the press, that the deputy leader of the Labour party has said that Labour should go ahead anyway and impose regional government.

My constituents would give a clear answer. They would say no to another layer of politicians, no to more bureaucracy and no to more tax to pay for all that. The general election will give them the opportunity to say no emphatically to Labour.

12 noon

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has the solution in his own hands. The gist of his speech was that Labour policies are unpopular and Tory policies are popular. The remedy is simple—that he meets the Prime Minister and suggests that he holds an early general election, so that we may discover what the public think.

The hon. Gentleman, being a shrewd lawyer, has the sense not to do so. Presumably, one of the reasons why he made a lengthy speech was that he realises with nostalgia that he will not be with us much longer. That is one of the things that will no doubt motivate him in the few months remaining to him.

I want to speak about three aspects of public sector decision making in my constituency. Although I do not expect the present Government to be around for much longer, they can do a great deal of damage in the time that remains. One aspect concerns the railways, one concerns the Post Office and another concerns the health service.

I would have spoken of this with anger some time ago, but this week no one who cares about institutions in Britain feels anything but sadness that the great national asset of our rail network has been sold by the Government. That asset was acquired by a Labour Government after the war, not for reasons of dogma, but because it was obviously in the national interest that a rail network should be planned nationally, and it was ludicrous to try to pretend that one could have competition in a rail network in the way that one can with ordinary consumer goods.

Perhaps I should declare an interest. For at least three generations, my family has made a living working for the railways, and I remember how proud my father was when the railways were taken into public ownership in 1948.

When I think of the money spent on privatisation—£287 million on reorganisation costs within British Rail alone, reducing the network to 100 different individual companies—I think of what might have been done if only a fraction of that money had been spent on services locally, regionally and nationally. Why, four years ago, did British Rail remove the InterCity network link between Telford and London? Why could it not have spent a fraction of the costs of privatisation on electrifying the line from Wolverhampton through to Shrewsbury?

One would suppose that decision making in the rail network was fairly simple, but let me take an example of the lunacy of what has happened to the rail network. For some months, I have been trying to find out about the improvement of access for people with disabilities to Wellington railway station. I still have not discovered who is responsible for ensuring that disabled people have proper access to a specific railway station. Is it Railtrack? Is it the train operating company? Is it the franchising director? Is it the Government? Who is it? The answer is that we have returned almost to the bad old pre-grouping days—almost pre-1923, not even pre-1948—when everyone was in competition and no one was clearly responsible for crucial services such as access for disabled people.

The Government have taken another bad decision related to the railways. Why do a Government who claim that they want to transfer freight from road to rail act contrary to that claim in the one area where they have power to take decisions—defence transport? The Ministry of Defence has been closing rail links to defence depots at an alarming rate of knots, including that to Donnington depot in my constituency. That Government Department is obviously taking decisions to transfer freight from rail to road, because it is closing the rail links, at a time when the Secretary of State for Transport is saying that it is crucial to move more freight on to the railways.

I have found those aspects of rail decision making bewildering, and I have no confidence that the newly privatised rail network will make any development in those crucial areas.

I now move on to my second point. Although I may be being unfair, because the decision has not yet been made, for some months it has been mooted that Post Office

[Mr. Bruce Grocott]

Counters Ltd. wants to close Wellington post office. As one would expect, that has met massive opposition from Wellington town council, from Wrekin district council, from myself and from my colleague and friend Peter Bradley—the prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for the neighbouring new Wrekin constituency. Despite the opposition, all the signs are that Post Office Counters will go ahead and close the post office.

What does that tell us about whether the postal service should exist in the public interest to serve the public good or be operated on the basis of private interest and private gain? I know which answer my constituents give to that question—they have given it loud and clear, but I fear that Post Office Counters will not be listening.

Finally, I wish to mention the fact that, despite a massive public campaign to establish a consultant maternity unit at the Princess Royal hospital in my constituency, the Shropshire health authority has failed to acknowledge the strength of the case and the fact that the structure and distribution of the population of Shropshire have changed. The new town of Telford, which I am proud to represent, has been growing and expanding, and needs a development in key medical areas—and a consultant maternity unit is one of the most important I can think of. I have no confidence that the health authority is logically considering the needs of the whole county, and especially not those resulting from the growth of Telford.

Those three public sector areas—the railways, the Post Office and the health service—are all crucial to the livelihood of the people we represent. I have drawn attention to four bad decisions taken by the Government in those areas—decisions that they will start to regret when they face the electorate at the next general election.

12.7 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Briefly, I endorse the points that my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) just made. I also mention the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) is right to seek the amendment of the Bill. It is unjust and flawed, and can be costly and brutal. Hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that the Bill should be amended. The only thing that prevents it from happening is the Government's unwillingness to confess that they made a serious blunder.

I shall briefly mention two matters. The first concerns national health service pensions. Constituency experience has led me to believe that there is a continuing injustice. A person retiring from the national health service early on health grounds may expect to receive a pension, but that person must prove that there is no prospect of recovery. In pursuing a specific case, I learned from the National Health Service Pensions Agency that that was the requirement, but at least the agency then spelled out that the employer must not lead the employee to expect that the pension will follow.

I will not mention names, because I have not consulted my constituent—nor is it appropriate yet. In my constituent's case, the trust that employed her said that it had not led her to believe that she would receive a pension, but she was able to give me a document showing the estimate of the pension that she would receive if she accepted termination of employment, as she did. That is an injustice. I suspect that it has happened before, and it needs to be examined.

I refer also to hedgerows, which I have long sought to protect. Hon. Members with an interest in this matter were persuaded not to pursue private Members' initiatives, because the Government took power to introduce regulations to protect hedgerows in 1994. However, it is now 1996, and patience is running out.

We need progress in this area, if only to resolve the continuing and historical problem of hedgerows that are already lawfully protected under the 4,000 private Acts of Enclosure that were passed by Parliament before 1840 and which have never been repealed. We need to resolve this matter. I take it that, when a test case occurs—as is likely in Yorkshire shortly—the Government will consider its implications.

12.10 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): This morning there have been only 12 Back-Bench speeches, which is somewhat fewer than normal. A number of themes have emerged in the speeches of hon. Members, including beef and the siting of the millennium exhibition—four or five hon. Members referred to these issues.

I was not present in the House yesterday during the statement on BSE, but I read *Hansard* this morning. We have a major catastrophe on our hands, as I am sure the Leader of the House is aware. Farmers have been damaged, farm supplies have been damaged, the value of farm land has been damaged, the road haulage industry has been damaged, auctioneers have been damaged, meat manufacturers have been damaged, butchers have been damaged, consumers have been damaged, and taxpayers will be damaged. All because of what?

On 20 March, two Ministers came to the Dispatch Box and made statements on the same issue. Clearly, the Government did not undertake an analysis of the risk of the statements. The Ministers told us that people were dying, perhaps as a result of the transfer of BSE from cattle. What did they expect the reaction to be? The Government did not consult our European partners or the farm industry before the statements were made.

The Government's policy on BSE is unclear. Following the initial statements, we were told that no cull was planned, then we were told that a cull was planned, then the number of cattle to be culled was planned, then the age of the cattle to be culled was in dispute, and now we have learnt that 67 per cent. of the known BSE cases in cattle were born after the feed ban came into force. There has been confusion from the day that the two Ministers made their statements. There have been continual statements, and a lack of clarity in the Government's policy.

The Government have flatly refused to talk about the fact that British beef was banned by the United States in 1987-88—the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was interviewed on the "Today" programme this morning, is an exception. A change in the European ban will not alter the American ban. We have not heard a succession of Ministers claiming that the Americans are being unfair.

This morning, the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to the American ban at least twice. He is quite right—he knows the game plan. It is to use this issue—which is of the Government's making—to turn the country to its side

by being anti-European. Hon. Members should forget the beef issue—it just happened to come along. It will not work. The farmers do not agree with the Government's current policy.

This major problem is affecting a whole range of people in this country. It may be argued that not all Members of Parliament represent farmers. However, there is a connection to the beef industry in all constituencies—there are consumers, taxpayers and suppliers. The factories of Birmingham are still manufacturing goods and equipment used by farmers. The road haulage industry is also being affected. We have a major catastrophe on our hands, because no one in the Government analysed the potential risk and consequences of the two statements.

The millennium exhibition was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) and for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), and by the hon. Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold). I will have to tread delicately, but I think that the result was 3:1 in favour of the millennium exhibition being in London. I shall try to redress that imbalance slightly. Without wishing to abuse my position at the Dispatch Box, I believe that the millennium exhibition should be held in the midlands.

The millennium exhibition is moving towards being the major 1990s example of a breakdown in the accepted standards of conduct of public administration in this country. Massive public funds are involved—at least £200 million—from the lottery fund via the Millennium Commission. I say to London Members—regardless of their political persuasion—that, if it was desired to have a major exhibition in the capital city, why was the issue ever raised and why were invitations ever issued to any site in the country to put in a bid to launch the exhibition?

There were 61 applications for 57 sites, which were reduced to two in London, one in Derby and one in Birmingham. At that point, it could have been said that the exhibition would be held in the capital, but that was not said. Last December, when the two full applications were received—one for Greenwich and one for the national exhibition centre—the rigging of the system started. Imagination, which put in the bid for the NEC site, did not submit a bid for the Greenwich site to start with. It was later asked to do so, because it was clear that its plans were superior.

The real problem arose on 28 February, when the Secretary of State for National Heritage said that the exhibition would go to Greenwich, subject to the money being put together by Sir Peter Levene's team by May. It is now May—there is no money, and there is no scheme. We are running out of time. London is clogged and the Greenwich site is a shambles—it is unclean and unhealthy. The City of London has shunned the issue, business has shunned the issue and leading entrepreneurs have shunned the issue—only the spiv element of British society is left. Do we want the spiv element to fund this massive exhibition? Of course not.

The London-based Government and the London-based Millennium Commission are biased against any initiatives from the regions and provinces, to the extent that leaks have emerged to the effect that, if the exhibition is not held in London, it will not be held at all. The country should have a millennium exhibition. The NEC management has shown commendable professional skill, and, even though there is a prima facie case for a judicial review, it has not sought one. The NEC remains available to carry the exhibition for the whole of the country, as it is quite clear that it will not be a success at Greenwich.

I ask the Leader of the House to comment on the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) about haemophiliacs. I cannot go into the detail, but hon. Members know that there is a major unfairness—to put it politely—in relation to people suffering from hepatitis C and people suffering from HIV as a result of contaminated blood products from the national health service.

They should be treated the same. The House should decide this issue, not the Government. I believe that, if this issue were put to a free vote, they would be treated the same. It is unfair. It is a moral issue. There would not be any arguments about this across the Floor of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) referred to a 13-year-old British citizen who is incarcerated by secret police in a Commonwealth country—albeit one that has been suspended for the time being, but I presume that it wants to get back into the Commonwealth's good books. Foreign Office Ministers are not jumping up and down about this issue. I am not knocking the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, because, when I deal with cases, the consular officials in London do a good job.

Pressure must be exerted on the Nigerian Government to ensure that the 13-year-old British-born British citizen returns home as quickly as possible, goes back to school and is with his family. I hope that the BBC World Service will make use of my hon. Friend's speech to shame the Nigerians into doing what any civilised Government would do to redress something that should never have happened.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), in one of his rare contributions, talked about the Port of Tyne authority's fight against forced privatisation. We do not know whether the changes will be beneficial in the long term. However, my hon. Friend referred to the huge contribution that the authority makes to his local economy, and that should not be affected by a Government who seek to privatise everything that moves. The case must be examined on its merits. If it is found that the authority should continue to exist, my hon. Friend's argument should be accepted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West referred to the scandal of the private sector wheel-clamping companies and the Government's failure to introduce legislation three years after first considering the matter. There are problems all over the country—it is not confined to any one area—where the spiv element are seeking to make a quick buck. In some cases, cars are left in prohibited areas as decoys to encourage other people to park there and be taken to the cleaners. That is totally unacceptable behaviour.

12.20 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have lost count of how many of these debates I have replied to in my capacity as Leader of the House in the past four years. I thought that today's debate began a little slowly. My usual practice is to avoid saying much about anything as there is not enough time, but today I thought that I may have to make up time.

[Mr. Tony Newton]

Therefore, I went to the trouble of securing a copy of the intergovernmental conference White Paper so that I could read from it as much as proved necessary in order to satisfy my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). However, I am once again in the position of having to rattle away and say as much as I can before the debate concludes at 12.30 pm.

I turn briefly to the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I shall not revisit the millennium issue. I do not accuse the hon. Gentleman of abusing his position on the Front Bench, but no one is in any doubt that he represents a midland, rather than a London, constituency. However, London Members of Parliament also put their oar in this morning, so they can continue the dispute between them.

The hon. Gentleman said that he was not present yesterday to hear the statement about beef. That was clear from his speech, because he repeated the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition, whose performance has received the reverse of rave reviews in today's newspapers. The Leader of the Opposition got it wrong. The hon. Member for Perry Barr has no doubt read the *Hansard report*, but I shall remind him of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said.

My right hon. Friend made it clear that his right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture spoke to Commissioner Fischler before the statements were made to the House. He went on to point out that the issue was leaked in a Labour-supporting newspaper on the morning of 12 March. He said:

"We spent hours that morning discussing the matter with scientists"—

I can vouch for that, because I attended those meetings—

"before doing what he"—

that is, the Leader of the Opposition—

"would have condemned us for if we had not done—coming straight to the House to report on precisely what was happening".—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1996; Vol. 278, c. 103.]

If the Government had sat on the information for any great length of time, the hon. Gentleman would have made the worst kind of rabble-rousing speech from the Opposition Dispatch Box accusing the Government of a cover-up, of failing to provide information and of misleading the public. I shall not listen to too much more about that.

I turn now to some of the other issues upon which hon. Members have invited me to comment. I turn particularly to the contribution of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who raised the issue of haemophiliac patients who contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood products before the heat treatment began in the late 1980s. He appropriately paid tribute to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) in that area. I am familiar with that tragic problem, as I was Minister for Health for part of that time.

The right hon. Gentleman knows—and was kind enough to acknowledge—that there is little that I can add this morning to the comments made on earlier occasions about the difficulties that the issue presents. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), met representatives of the Haemophilia Society in March to describe the action that the Government are taking.

There are continuing discussions about developing good practice in the treatment of those patients and ensuring that they have ready access to treatment centres. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends will examine carefully the right hon. Gentleman's comments, as well as those of one or two other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Perry Barr.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton read out a formidable list of charges, as he saw them, against the European Court of Justice. I think that I counted 11.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: There were 14.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry, I have missed three. It was a lengthy list of charges.

My hon. and learned Friend kindly adverted to the fact that the Government make clear in the White Paper—which I have already brandished in the House—their concern that the court's interpretation sometimes seems to go beyond the intentions of laws as framed originally. The White Paper sets out in broad terms the proposals that we expect to discuss at the IGC, and those matters are being worked up.

My hon. and learned Friend said that a memorandum is due for publication, but he will understand that it is not sensible or practicable for me to comment on it this morning in advance of its publication. However, I am sure that his words will be examined with appropriate care.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) raised a matter to which the hon. Member for Perry Barr also referred from the Dispatch Box. In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I make it clear that the British Government are doing—and will continue to do—everything we can to assist with the case. The British High Commission is pressing the Nigerian authorities for access to Adefolahan Mokuolu on humanitarian grounds, particularly as he is a minor.

I understand that the hon. Lady is in daily contact with the consular division on behalf of her constituent. The acting high commissioner raised the matter with the director general of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs only yesterday, and it undertook to investigate the situation. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do all they can to assist the hon. Lady's constituent who is in that awful position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) referred to the beef ban. I recognise the importance that he and his constituents attach to ensuring the smooth operation of the slaughter scheme for cows aged more than 30 months. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture made it clear yesterday that we are now operating at close to current capacity. I am sure that he will look carefully at my hon. Friend's comments about continuing problems in his area, and I shall ensure that he sees the piece of paper that my hon. Friend passed to me on behalf of the Somerset branch of the National Farmers Union. We are serious about ensuring the smooth operation of the scheme, but we should remember that it is a big task.

My hon. Friend overcame the frustration of recent weeks by adding to a 10-minute speech about beef that he said was terminated mid-sentence and returning to a subject that he raised with me via a question on the Housing Bill. He has shown his usual ingenuity and

dedication to his constituents' interests, and I shall ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my colleagues in the appropriate Departments.

The most engaging speech from my point of view was delivered by the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), the mostly silent former deputy Chief Whip. Somewhat ominously, he has moved to what I call the "trouble-making Bench" below the Gangway. I hope that is not an augury of future difficulties. The last time that he moved from the Front Bench to the Bench behind it—an unusual manoeuvre for a deputy Chief Whip—he suddenly burst into song, and denounced the Leader of the House for attempting to improve the procedures in this place. He made it clear that his views about that were unchanged.

I hope that we shall hear more from the hon. Gentleman in the new, responsible role that he fulfilled this morning on behalf of the Port of Tyne authority. The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government believe that the privatisation of ports produces more efficient, competitive and accountable operations, and offers greater opportunities to the people who work in the ports and benefit from their activities.

I do not have time to elaborate that argument or to comment on any of the other speeches, much as I might wish. I will certainly make sure that the remarks of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) are communicated to those of my colleagues who will be seeing the Norwegians at the international whaling conference.

I have just about run out of time—I am not sure when that will happen. I will just try to complete this next sentence. I hope that everybody—not least you, Madam Deputy Speaker—has a happy holiday.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

Deregulation

12.30 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): It is always a delight to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker—and an equal one to see my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster present to answer this debate. Normally, Adjournment debates are answered by a junior Minister, so to have a Cabinet Minister present is a delight, particularly as my right hon. Friend is well known for his interest in, and campaigning zeal for, deregulation.

Deregulation is firmly part of the Conservative party's ideology and folklore, having been around for nearly 20 years. The 1979 manifesto commitments were concerned with freeing up the markets, creating less restriction for individuals and boosting an enterprise economy. The 1985 White Paper, "Lifting the burden", charted the deregulation course for the next decade. The message was simple:

> "The amount of regulation which new and established firms face acts as a brake on enterprise and the wealth and job creating process."

By January 1994 a deregulation task force had been established, headed by none other than Lord Sainsbury. Contemporaneously, another White Paper, "Cutting Red Tape", was published. In addition to the deregulation task force, which consisted of dozens of committees and hundreds of captains of industry, a special deregulation unit was established within the Cabinet Office, employing 43 officials especially chosen for their deregulatory fervour. The cost was £1.3 million per annum.

Parliament passed the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill in 1994, and the Prime Minister threw his full weight behind the deregulatory initiative, saying that deregulation was at the heart of the Government's economic strategy. One year later, progress is at best disappointing and at worst deeply depressing. That Bill spent 16 hours and 11 minutes on the Floor of the House and another 92 hours and 56 minutes in Standing Committee. Among other things, it established the Select Committee on Deregulation—a fast-track system by which secondary legislation could be repealed, which has never been done before in the life of this Parliament or of this institution.

In 1994, the Government promised that they would refer one deregulation order a week to that Select Committee. Unfortunately, 100 orders never materialised. Instead, we have had to be content with 25 orders to date. They favour people who want to go greyhound racing, to go dancing on Sunday—I have nothing against that—to change the length of the school day and to sell salmon on Sunday in open markets in Scotland, and they allow local authorities to use their pay-and-display parking meters more flexibly. The Deregulation (Gun Barrel Proving) Order 1996 saves private business £200 but—wait for it—cost £10,000 to draft and print. To achieve all that, the Deregulation Select Committee has sat 34 times for more than 50 hours.

Deregulation has spawned an entire new layer of bureaucracy, created new buzz words and produced a new layer of Government. The Leader of the House, a Cabinet appointee and the Prime Minister are all concerned with deregulation—without it, some might not even have jobs. There is a deregulatory Minister in every Department.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

Pamphlets, circulars, booklets and departmental reviews are churned out. Experts and advisers are to be found in local government, and even the Institute of Directors has deregulation advisers. The cost is enormous.

The Select Committee is just one deregulatory initiative. Lord Sainsbury's task force, which has been taken over by Francis Maude, is another. The task force suggested that 605 pieces of legislation were ripe for repeal, and the Prime Minister added another 400. Of more than 1,000 measures identified, 643 have been repealed—but few have had the impact that Conservative Members would like. Comparing that figure with the 7,845 statutory instruments added to our legislation since January 1994 puts the matter in perspective. Admittedly, many of those instruments correct complicated or inadequate primary legislation such as the Jobseekers Act 1995 and the Children Act 1989, but that does not explain the need for 3,243 new statutory instruments already this year.

The volume is reaching such a level that it is impossible for Members of Parliament or Ministers to scrutinise them properly. Why, despite Parliament's intentions, and the commitment by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to deregulation—which I whole-heartedly support as a number one priority to help industry—is deregulation not happening? It is not an absence of intention or good will on the part of Ministers or officials, but a question of the long-standing culture and ethos of the country, whereby Ministers and Whitehall see their modus vivendi as passing bigger, better, longer and more complicated laws with cleverer and more experienced officials drafting, amending and improving them. The culture is not to repeal laws, reduce the volume of legislation, or cut the number of bureaucrats or red tape—although one would have thought from all the speeches and good intentions of Ministers that a great deal more was happening. Regrettably, there is a deep shadow between intention and action.

The problem is in the public psyche, which has been conditioned to believe that rules and regulations solve problems, when they do not automatically do so. All of us receive letters from constituents demanding that we introduce new legislation. How often do Members of Parliament receive letters demanding the repeal of laws? The public have been conditioned into believing that they are better off taking less responsibility. They suffer from the illusion, and the erroneous belief, that life is better being hemmed in by a false sense of security created by additional rules and regulations.

There are also the buzz words of safety, security and hygiene. One cannot change anything in legislation covered by those three words because they are sacrosanct and have a mystique with which nothing must interfere. If that perception is to change, rewards for goals achieved must be reversed. In future, civil servants should be promoted not for proposing and drafting new legislation but for finding a way of reducing the number of laws on the statute book.

Deregulation is unachievable until the root cause of regulation is tackled, which means a culture shock of gargantuan proportions. Inaction in legislative terms must no longer be viewed as sloth, but as prudence. Ministers should be judged not by the number of statutory instruments that emanate from their Departments but by the paucity of legislation coming from their offices. If the Government's aim is to lift the burden off the backs of the people, a stick and carrot approach must be introduced—a carrot for those who implement deregulation and a stick for those who do not.

Consider, for instance, the deregulation order—one of the 25—on building certificates. It is said that the saving to business will be £68,000; but only recently it has emerged that there will be an additional cost of £350,000 for employing more local government officials to take over the administration. So the money saved to private business is simply transferred, six times over, to local authorities. The stick should have been used in this case.

The cost compliance assessment is another example of the shortcomings in this process. The Government rightly insist that such an assessment accompany every piece of legislation, highlighting the additional burden on private industry imposed by the legislation. Unfortunately, the compliance cost assessment does not highlight the additional costs to Government and local government. That excellent idea—emanating, I think, from the Prime Minister—is thus defective because it deals only with the additional costs for private enterprise, not with those for the public sector.

The culture shockwaves must not stop at Dover: they must cross the channel to Brussels, from which directives, rules and regulations are spewed out at an alarming rate. The number of directives, to be sure, has declined, from 66 in 1993 to 19 this year, but the number of rules and regulations has otherwise continued at nearly 1,000 a year. They are so dispatched that most manage to avoid scrutiny by the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers or Westminster Members. Commission officials are using a procedure that denies every Parliament in Europe the opportunity to challenge the Commission's official view. Bureaucracy in Brussels has found a device in the treaty of Rome enabling it to erode the fringes of our lives, but with no accountability.

That is fundamentally wrong, and if the Brussels bureaucracy were not enough, our own officials compound the problem by hijacking European directives and adding burdens to them, going beyond the minimum requirements in the directives. The result is even more obligations imposed on those who live in Britain.

Gold plating has been outlawed by Cabinet Ministers in terms similar to those used by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who pledged last November on the Floor of the House that he had a strict rule that no European legislation could be gold plated in his Department. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has said something similar. What about all the gold plating that has already taken place? It has been going on for nearly 25 years. Why do we not pull out all those directives and remove the add-ons from them?

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I have come in specifically to listen to my hon. Friend's speech. One of the core problems, surely, is that civil servants here and in Europe want to tidy up the process of democracy and get things running quickly and smoothly. Therein lies the problem with statutory instruments—the more quickly we ram them through this place, the less chance there is to consider them carefully. If people have the opportunity to examine them slowly and ask questions about them, there is more chance of their emerging in the right form.

Should we not try to change the system here and return to scrutinising more of the documents on the Floor of the House, to slow them up?

Mr. Steen: I am all for anything that will stop this place becoming a county council and power leaking away to the Brussels bureaucracy. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for joining in this important debate.

In answer to my parliamentary questions to all Government Departments suggesting that we remove the add-ons, Departments wrote to say that they could not even tell me how many add-ons there have been in the past three years, let alone the past 25, because the exercise could be done only at "disproportionate cost". Disproportionate to what?

In the past three years, the Department of Trade and Industry has implemented 33 directives; MAFF has implemented 113. Surely, with our modern technology, officials could find out which of those directives have been added to. If they lack the time, what about using the 43 staff in the deregulation unit? They could be put to work on this important task straight away.

A good example of the damage done by gold plating is a small oyster farm in my constituency which, for the past eight years, has successfully sold about 70,000 oysters a year. It has been vetted and approved by the local environmental health people from South Hams district council. The farm uses a system that recycles sea water—a system introduced by Captain Philip Gibbon, a well-known environmentalist who is hostile to pollution.

The proprietor uses a system that is entirely consistent with the rules in the European Community's shellfish hygiene directive 91/492/EC. There are seven identical farms in the Netherlands which seem to operate successfully without falling foul of Dutch or EC law. The problem, therefore, is not the local health officers but the Government's officials in Weymouth, who are refusing to grant a licence to Captain Gibbon.

The problem is further compounded by the lack of an appeal mechanism. During the passage of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill, I and other colleagues pressed for a local appeals mechanism. If officials and business men disagreed locally, there should be an appeal procedure in the local magistrates court, we argued. The Government opposed the idea; two years later, all we have is a consultative draft statutory instrument—yet another one.

So Captain Gibbon has nowhere to go. He has closed the plant. Do we want to create small firms or close them? Ours, after all, is supposed to be the party of small business. Yet Captain Gibbon has been clobbered by regulatory initiatives and the zeal of MAFF officials. All he can do now is go—believe it or not—to the European Commission; or he can take up the suggestion of the Fisheries Minister and go to the Ministry with the chief environmental health officer of South Hams district council and MAFF officials, whereupon the Minister will try to act as judge in the case.

Deregulation is just not happening in the way we were promised. It is proving much more difficult than we thought at first. A stick and carrot approach should be introduced: promotion for those who deregulate and demotion for those who do not. Let us get rid of private Members' Bills in their current form. What we want are private Members' deregulatory Bills. Members in the new Session should be allowed to introduce only deregulatory measures, not new legislation.

I also suggest a review of the gold plating on all the directives implemented here over the past 25 years. That should be done in the next three months by the deregulation unit in the Cabinet Office. Just as the Treasury approves all Government Departments' expenditure, the Cabinet Office must do likewise for all statutory instruments, directives, rules and regulations emanating from Government Departments. The Cabinet Office should vet every statutory instrument and should have a Treasury-like veto on deregulation. The Minister could make a great deal of progress in this area.

Compliance cost assessments should include the additional cost to the public purse, not just that to the private purse. They should also list the numbers of additional officials and the cost of employing them incurred by any new deregulation measures. Above all, we must work for a change of culture, in Whitehall and at Westminster so that, with renewed vigour, we can tackle the blanket of red tapé which continues to suffocate enterprise and unnecessarily to hold back our national economy.

12.48 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I welcome the debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on it. It is noticeable that, while Conservative Members take an interest in the subject of deregulation, not a single Opposition Member is here for the debate. We have noted not just the Opposition's lack of interest but even their hostility to the notion of deregulation, to the unit in the Cabinet Office and to the deregulation task force. We have an immense task before us, and I thank my hon. Friend for taking such a close interest in it.

I sometimes feel like a remote descendant of King Canute. The tide of legislation—primary and secondary, European and domestic—keeps coming in, and one does one's best, with the help and support of my hon. Friend and Government colleagues, to stem it. As life becomes more complicated, we inevitably need more regulation, but it has to be better and simpler. When we introduce new regulations, we must take the opportunity of repeal.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to the need for a change of culture. That change of culture must occur not only in Whitehall, but in Brussels. I shall have something to say about that in the remaining 11 minutes of the debate.

My hon. Friend was right to stress the importance of small businesses and the impact of regulations on them as employment growth depends on small businesses. I have long believed that regulation should be a rhetoric-free zone. The devil is in the detail. It is boring, it is difficult and, as the Duke of Wellington used to say, it is very hard pounding, but it is essential work.

I shall divide my remarks equally between a brief resumé of what we have achieved so far and what we need to do. I note from the Order Paper that tonight we shall be asked to vote on three excellent deregulation measures resulting from the deregulation and contracting out procedure. My hon. Friend is right to say that we have laid only 26 such measures and 12 have become law so far, but more significant measures will be laid.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

I commend the cheque truncation order, which will save the banking industry many millions of pounds by avoiding the unnecessary circulation of old cheques once they have been drawn, debited and credited to accounts.

The compliance cost assessment procedure is working reasonably well. I take my hon. Friend's point about public sector costs and I shall look again at that part of the procedure. We have just published a new booklet on the other side of compliance cost—the risks and benefits to society of proceeding with legislation. I commend that new booklet to the House and I have circulated it to all Departments. In respect of all legislation—primary, secondary, European and Whitehall generated—we should be looking at the cost and the benefit and taking a deep breath and deciding not to proceed when Ministers are not convinced that there is an overwhelming case for proceeding.

We are looking at statutory instruments ex poste—or after Ministers have approved them. I shall say more about that in a moment. In respect of Europe, I am going to Brussels on Tuesday, to the Internal Market Council, which will consider a resolution that I hope will commend itself to most countries. It instructs the Commission to adopt new policy procedures in respect of the impact of regulations on small firms and to reaffirm the principle of proportionality, and it urges the Commission to draw up directives that are goal based and not prescriptive.

I am pleased that the Commission has adopted new procedures—before agreeing directives and proposing them to Councils of Ministers—on the principle of consultation, assessing the costs, improving the principle of the fiche d'impact system that has operated for a number of years—I believe, unsatisfactorily—and re-emphasising the need for subsidiarity, that is, not legislating in the first place if it is not necessary.

I am pleased that, since November, when we began our campaign in Europe, we have reaped some modest fruits of that effort. We have achieved an exemption for unit pricing for small businesses. That is a small but welcome step forward. Following the Internal Market Council meeting on Tuesday, the Commission will set to work on codifying and simplifying blocks of legislation in respect of Intrastat—documents dealing with imports and exports in Europe—and construction products in an attempt to simplify the regulations to enhance Community trade. I hope that next year we shall simplify regulations on machine standards and food hygiene.

We have published a new checklist for Departments dealing with gold plating. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to focus on that and I have to admit that he is correct. We are now looking to stop gold plating. My Department does not have the staff or resources—even with my 42 excellent civil servants—to go back not just 24 years to accession, but 700 years of statute law.

I also have good news to report. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office announced the proposed new fire regulations. I am delighted to say that there is no gold plate on those proposed United Kingdom implementing regulations following the European directive. It has been a long, hard-fought battle involving proper discussion between all Departments, but we are not imposing measurable financial burdens on British businesses by implementing those regulations.

Mr. Steen: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his achievements with the new fire regulations. I know that he has fought long and hard and he has managed to put out most of the fires. If his Department does not have sufficient staff, could he not ask other Government Departments that have tens of thousands of officials to help? Each of his Cabinet colleagues could be responsible for looking at the past three years gold plating in the directives relating to their Departments.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, I shall, but not necessarily in that precise way to that or time scale. It is important that we review what has happened in the past.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I admire the way in which my right hon. Friend has stuck to his task of deregulation, which often resembles wading through treacle. Perhaps one of his civil servants could make a list of our successes—telephones, airways and even lifts come to mind—to be circulated among our partners in Europe to show that deregulation really works.

Mr. Freeman: I gratefully accept my hon. Friend's excellent suggestion. I had it in mind to produce something during the summer describing exactly what we have done so far and our plans for the future. I might consult my hon. Friend on its exact form and content.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me briefly to make progress as I would like to outline our plans. We need to review existing directives. I would single out the electromagnetic compatibility directive, which is causing many problems.

I would like to lay shortly our model appeals order, which will be open to Departments to include in their own primary legislation so that we have a sensible procedure for appealing to tribunals. I take the interesting point made by my hon. Friend that there could be an anomaly in respect of his constituent's oyster farm. We are proposing a new procedure to appeal to tribunals, but not to magistrates courts. I believe that my hon. Friend's constituent has a right of appeal to a magistrates court under the food safety legislation, but only on a point of law and not on the merit of the case. So the debate has raised an important matter that I shall now review.

Mr. Duncan Smith: As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is sitting next to him on the Front Bench, perhaps my right hon. Friend could pass on to him the suggestion that the House should have a better mechanism to slow down the process of debate, which is not good enough. If the statutory instruments procedure allowed for a further stage of consideration, that would help.

Mr. Freeman: I take that point. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting it on record once again. I know that my right hon. Friend the Lord President will read the record of the debate and note that point.

Let me deal with two final points, both of which are extremely important. The first relates to enforcement and the right of appeal—not necessarily in a legalistic sense—and to the problems of disproportionate enforcement at

the point of the consumer and how the average citizen is affected by an enforcement order or procedure initiated by a trading standards officer, an environmental health officer or a health and safety executive officer. We have in place, by following the procedures of sections 5 and 6 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, a mechanism by which one can ask the official for a written explanation of the procedures, but we should consider going further. I should like to consider carefully, possibly with the advice of my hon. Friends who take an interest in deregulation, how we can empower the citizen and give the citizen the right to raise quickly and automatically a concern about the method by which a regulation is enforced.

On the flow of legislation, I am not convinced that we need a single conduit through which all statutory instruments flow in the Cabinet Office. That would be unwieldy, although I shall reflect on it. I would like all Departments to use the compliance cost assessment and risk assessment principles properly, and all Ministers to be satisfied in all instances of statutory instruments affecting business and industry that proper procedures have been followed.

I should like to reflect further on the general procedures through which we handle statutory instruments. There are 3,000 a year, although probably no more than 1,000 affect businesses and industries. I am grateful to all my hon. Friends who, unlike Labour Members, take an interest in deregulation. I look forward to working with them.

Motability

1 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I make just one apology for bringing this matter back before the House—a very sad and belated apology to David Whitton, a remarkable, extremely bright and extremely principled campaigner for disability rights, who suddenly and tragically died quite recently. I apologise to David because, when he first contacted me about Motability—it seems a long time ago—I promised him that I would undertake to get Parliament to take action on what he believed was a quite unprincipled scam being perpetrated by a cartel of high street banks. He believed that the banks were exploiting many disabled people, the allowances made to them through the mobility component of the disability living allowance, and the public, because the scheme is centrally funded. I am very sad that I have not been able to honour the promise in David's lifetime, but it does not deter me in the slightest from continuing to pursue the matter until I am certain that it has been resolved in the terms that he would have wished.

David's belief about what is wrong with the relationship between Motability the charity and Motability Finance Ltd., the private, for-profit financial arm, is very simple. He believed that up to £100 million which rightly belonged to disabled people had been inappropriately syphoned off by the banks into their private profits. I will explain how that might have come about.

It is important to distinguish between Motability the charity and MFL the private company. Motability the charity encompasses a wonderful idea. I have no complaints about the way in which it is run. But there are major differences between the two bodies. One is that of scale. The charity has a turnover of £3 million, while MFL, the finance company, has a turnover of £375 million, assets of £1 billion and credit at any given time of up to £1.5 billion. I understand that MFL is the biggest car-leasing business in the world.

I initially became aware of the matter through another campaigner for disabled rights, my constituent Mick Reynolds, who was in the bizarre position of being pressured by the finance company to accept a vehicle under the scheme which did not meet his needs and would have cost him more than a vehicle which did meet his needs and that he would have preferred. We fought a long battle to reverse that decision, during which he educated me about some of the things going on behind the scenes in MFL and introduced me to David Whitton. It was from there that my real education in the behind-the-scenes activities of Motability Finance Ltd. took off.

All questions on the matter boil down to four basic questions: who controls whom; whether the arrangements between a charity and a private company offer the best deal for disabled people; whether excess profits and charges are being made; and whether the stranglehold of the banking cartel is corrupt and unaccountable.

I have made a considerable effort to find out what is going on inside MFL, but its organisational structure makes a masonic lodge look like open government. I suspect that the House could find out more about foreign spy rings than it could about the internal goings-on in the Motability Finance Ltd. empire and how the firm manages public money.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

There have been a series of internal reports on MFL and Motability, all of which have been undisclosed and have criticised the level of profits and the relationship between Motability the charity and MFL the private monopoly. The first report that I came across was one picked up by the accountancy firm KPMG, in which it suggested that the banks were making a 30 per cent. return on capital. That is more than double the rate of return of private car-leasing companies.

When MFL was challenged, it said that the figures were notional and that the report was an exercise. Yet the exercise was conducted by KPMG on the basis of figures provided by MFL. If a company provides figures from which such a conclusion is drawn, it should accept the validity of the conclusion reached by a reputable firm of accountants.

The second report I came across was commissioned by an equally principled and wholly praiseworthy civil servant, Simon Willis, who was seconded into the Motability scheme. He had the sense to bring in a company of charity solicitors, Birchams, which conducted a report on the way in which the relationship between the charity and the finance company was working. It made the most profound criticisms of that relationship. It said that

"the Governors of Motability have no clear picture of the effective rate of return being earned by the banks or the current position on surpluses since MFL's accounts reveal nothing on these lines and the management accounts of the banks relating to the Motability scheme have never been disclosed.

We consider it imperative that the Governors of Motability now require the banks to disclose the relevant accounts so as to provide a full picture of their trading position, profitability and accumulated reserves and surpluses. Without this information, the Governors are incapable of performing their duty to satisfy themselves that there are no alternative funding sources which could provide better value for money to Motability's customers."

Birchams had no axe to grind. It is important to note that, having issued the report that it was commissioned to produce, it was immediately decommissioned; the rest of the processing of its report remains a mystery, having been handled internally within Motability Finance Ltd.

The report commissioned by Simon Willis came on the back of an earlier and in many ways much more damning internal letter written by someone who ought to have known exactly what was going on in Motability—Alan Outten, who was not only a banker and a member of the board of directors of Motability Finance Ltd. for 15 years, but had been deputy chairman of Motability Finance Ltd. He said:

"Some 2 or 3 years ago the banks reduced their gross margin to 1.5 per cent. gross, made up of 0.5 per cent. over cost of funds plus 1 per cent. profit margin . . . Somewhere along the line, MFL 'shifted the goal posts' without the agreement of the Charity, so that each bank received a flat management fee of £50,000 each plus an additional funding margin of 0.1 per cent.

This change effectively increased the 'management charge' from a maximum of £600,000 to £1 million . . . It is surely an anomaly that the board of MFL should be paid £1 million per annum (and increasing) by the Charity for representing the interests of the banks, which are not consistent with the objects of the Charity."

I suspect that that letter was one of the factors that prompted Simon Willis to call for the independent report by Birchams.

Since that time, a further report has been commissioned. Schroeders merchant bank was asked to look at profitability levels within the company. Again, I have been unsuccessful in getting a full copy; I have managed to get only an executive summary of the bank's report, but the bottom line is simple. Schroeders bank says:

"The current margins, which were agreed in the autumn of 1993, appear now to be out of line with the market. The margins charged by the Partners should therefore be revised in the light of this benchmarking exercise."

In practical terms, that comment amounts to a statement by Schroeders that the margins to which the banks have been working are probably twice as high as could legitimately be justified.

There have been changes in the charging regime only as a result of public pressure from disabled people, from organisations representing disabled people and from campaigners in this House and in the other place who have sought to raise the matter in both Houses. Since the matter was raised, MFL has made a series of reductions, but all have been designed simply to forestall further criticism.

The whole structure of MFL is based on obsessive secrecy and obsessive control. The company has seen not only the Birchams report and the Alan Outten letter, but a letter sent by Simon Willis to the chairman of Motability pointing out his concerns about the extent to which a public charity was effectively owned by a private, for-profit company and about the fact that that company had no accountability to the charity or, ultimately, to the Government who fund it. In his letter to the chairman, Simon Willis said:

"All suppliers to the scheme are subject to continual or periodic competition except the banks . . . Not only are they exempt from market pressures; the governors of the charity have repeatedly been denied access to the partnership accounts which underpin the scheme's financing.

The charity commissioners run an annual profitability study to determine the appropriateness of the profit margins . . . The 1992 study was shown briefly to the governors but all copies were then recalled. Among several recommendations which have not been pursued, it concluded that 'higher than envisaged returns appear to be being made by the Banks.' For some reason the 1993 study was not shown to the executive governors. I only saw it in draft and I seem to recall a surplus approaching £100 million and a return on capital of over 20 per cent. to the funding banks."

That is not a picture of a charity being able responsibly to oversee its stewardship of the allocation of public moneys and to fulfil the goals of a laudable scheme which gives disabled people the mobility to which they are entitled.

We are currently waiting for the report by the National Audit Office. I believe that the delay in issuing that report is probably a result of its having been nobbled. I am led to believe that there are aspects of the relationship between MFL—with its beneath-the-surface partnership accounts—and Motability that will not be allowed to be properly explored.

Throughout this time, as the contingency funding is allowed to remain in the banks' hands and MFL is driven by the banks' priorities, I have had a constituent, Liz Carr, whose physical condition has changed dramatically since she acquired a vehicle. She now finds that she is unable to get a change in her lease to entitle her to a more appropriate and adapted vehicle because, she is told, adaptation funds are not there. The fact that some £100 million is sitting in an account somewhere else suggests that the funds are indeed there, but that moneys belonging to disabled people are not being allowed to be used in the interests of disabled people.

Although I said that MFL had not been unresponsive, it is worth bearing in mind its first response. The first criticism produced a remarkable change in the company. The chair of the company wrote back to the charity at the end of 1993 saying:

"I am delighted to inform you that at the meeting on the 7th December there was unanimous support from the banks to make a donation to the charity of fifteen million pounds in March 1994, with a commitment to advance a further ten million pounds in March 1995."

What a generous offer. Ignoring for the moment the fact that the company was giving back disabled people's money to disabled people, what troubled me most were the strings attached to the offer. The chair went on to say:

"Given that such a donation will result in an initial insufficiency of reserves, it was also felt necessary that certain assurances should be sought from the charity."

The most important of those assurances was that

"the charity will not, without the partners' prior consent, seek to admit any other lessors into the scheme."

Thus the terms on which money would be handed back was a guarantee that the banks would be offered a perpetual monopoly so that they could continue to milk a no-risk leasing scheme, using public money to provide themselves with comfortable private profits. That is a wonderful and unique example of public money being used to provide a banking cartel with money for nothing and perks for free. There is no way in which the Government—or Motability—can either test the value for money offered by the banks or renegotiate terms on the basis of clear knowledge of the charges being made. The current arrangements are untenable and unprincipled.

That is not just my view; I believe that the Minister also takes that view. I am grateful to whoever it was who supplied me with a copy of a letter sent by the permanent secretary at the Department of Social Security. On 3 February 1995, he wrote to Gerry Acher, the vice chairman of Motability, saying:

"My Secretary of State said that a monopoly could not continue unchallenged indefinitely".

The permanent secretary also said that in terms of the requirements of the charity, it was important that three key issues were addressed. First, the charity must be able

"to demonstrate that there is sufficient competitive pressure in the scheme to ensure that disabled customers are getting the best deal possible."

Secondly, there was a

"need to get a properly documented memorandum of understanding between the Department and Motability, and between Motability and MFL as soon as possible."

Thirdly, the Comptroller and Auditor General had to be assured that

"proper control is exercised in disbursement of public monies on both the direct DSS payments to Motability and the DLA money which funds the scheme."

On this we have made little or no progress. Having raised the matter initially, I have started to get letters from distributors telling me of their embarrassment at knowing that they could offer disabled people better terms through other commercial credit organisations than through the leasing arrangements in which Motability Finance has a monopoly. In some of the examples that I have been given, interest rates of 20 per cent. APR were quoted: twice the rate that other finance organisations could have offered. In his original letter, Simon Willis made precisely this point—that an array of banks and credit companies in the market place could be tested to discover whether the MFL banking cartel offers the best deal in the interests of disabled people. That possibility has been consistently thwarted, undermined and rejected.

In one sense, I cannot blame the banks. They are in a position in which they are fishing for money in a barrel, and one can hardly blame them for wanting to continue fishing. But it is not an acceptable position, and neither disabled people nor the House can be expected to tolerate it.

I ask the Minister to undertake two clear actions. I do not and will not go along with the line of inquiry that simply asks why this arrangement, which I believe is both crooked and corrupting, should have been allowed to continue for so long. I know that outside the House there is a great deal of speculation about the personal and corporate links between those who appear to have significant influence in the shaping of policy in Motability Finance Ltd. and donations that have been made over the years to the Conservative party, but that is for other people to explore.

My reason for raising the matter in the House today is to ask for two things. I ask the Minister to instruct Motability to open up its options and to break the banking cartel's sense of ownership of the charity. The charity must be in a position to pursue its own priorities so that its destiny and resources are not at the behest of banks and so that it can, if it so chooses, test out the banks' offer against other possible sources of money. I hope that the Minister will give the House that assurance today.

I hope that the Minister will also assure me that he will support another action that I have taken today. I have written to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee asking for that Committee to investigate this matter. I have been told that, behind the scenes, there is a great fear that Parliament will seek to scrutinise some of the completely unjustifiable terms on which the relationship between the banks and the charity has been allowed to continue. I have written to the Chairman of that Committee to ask it to investigate the matter so that there is a proper parliamentary investigation of what is going on. I ask the Minister to join me in supporting that approach.

1.22 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) for raising this important subject for debate, which I am more than happy to answer. I am extremely disappointed that he has left me no time to deal with the points that he has raised, so I shall not bother to answer many of the points. If the hon. Gentleman does not give me sufficient time to deal with the issue properly, he cannot expect me to deal with it in a half-hearted fashion. He knows that the National Audit Office is dealing with the matter and that a report is expected soon.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South used it as a casual phrase, but he should be aware of its seriousness: simply to refer to the delay as being due to the likelihood of the National Audit Office "being nobbled", I think, means that he is accusing a public servant of being corrupt. It is up to him if he is content to leave that comment on the record, but that is what it

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

means. He is saying that if the NAO comes out and reports more or less along the lines that he has taken, fair enough, he will look at the report. If it does not, however, it is because a public servant is corrupt. If that is not what he meant, I urge him to take another opportunity, in due course, to make that very clear.

As most hon. Members know, Motability was set up in 1977 with all-party support. The then Secretary of State invited the late Lord Goodman to consider how disabled people could use their mobility allowance to gain access to a vehicle on terms representing good value for money. Lord Goodman, with Lord Sterling—Motability's present chairman—approached the Committee of Clearing Banks for assistance. They then set up the financing scheme which the hon. Gentleman now regards as crooked and corrupting. I am sure that they would be disappointed, and that the previous Labour Administration would be disappointed, to be associated with the words used by the hon. Gentleman.

As the hon. Member for Nottingham, South went on to say briefly, Motability has developed to become probably the most successful organisation of its kind in the world. It provides an opportunity for independent transport for hundreds of thousands of people who would otherwise not have such transport. It is a shame that that aspect of the matter is not highlighted more often. Motability is a very large scheme. Funding has grown. The assets owned by the bank, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, are the cars that people drive. As he will be aware, last year Motability achieved a significant milestone with the handing over of the 500,000th car. The Government therefore support the objective of the Motability scheme and acknowledge the very real benefits that the scheme can provide by allowing disabled people to become independently mobile.

The custodians of the scheme must be the governors of Motability. The governors and trustees have very clear responsibilities in relation to the general administration of Motability's aims and objectives, as set out in its royal charter, and in controlling the various charitable funds at its disposal. It is for Motability to ensure that the suppliers of the scheme offer value for money. Motability is a registered charity and, as such, is required to deposit copies of its annual accounts with the Charity Commission and to comply with company and charity law. As a requirement of Government grant, Motability must also submit its annual accounts to the NAO and is open to scrutiny by the NAO.

As the hon. Member for Nottingham, South knows, the NAO is currently preparing a value-for-money report concerning the Motability scheme. If Parliament subsequently wants to scrutinise Motability and its work, that would present no problem for Ministers or, I should imagine, for the scheme. If Parliament wishes to do that, it would be perfectly proper. Overall, however, the hon. Member is setting up a conspiracy theory and any evidence that comes to hand which does not back up that theory can be dismissed in one way or another. I find that disappointing.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of specific points, of which I shall be able to deal with only one or two. However, I shall deal with some of the basics.

Who is in charge of the scheme? According to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, it is the boss banks or something like that. The Motability scheme is a unique partnership between Government, the charitable sector and the private sector. Each partner in the scheme has its part to play. The governors of Motability have clear overall responsibility, as set out in its royal charter and articles of association, to ensure that the scheme operates in the interests of all beneficiaries.

I should deal with the transparency of the scheme, because that is important. While not directly responsible for the operation of the Motability scheme, I am keenly interested that it continues to achieve the Government's objective for the scheme: the provision of personal transport, for those who qualify, at terms which represent good value for money for the disabled customer. We are united in putting the disabled customer at the heart of our concerns and in wanting to ensure that the scheme works well for them.

Adverse comment and criticism of the scheme is a matter for serious concern and urgent attention. Having seen Motability's outstanding success, and being confident of the operation's propriety, I have been surprised at the range of criticism levelled at the scheme and at many the guises in which it has appeared. However, I do not take any issue with the hon. Member for Nottingham, South or with any others for seeking to find out information about the scheme and to raise legitimate questions.

A proportion of what the hon. Member for Nottingham, South said—he knows that we have a good relationship—was perfectly fair and reasonable. It is only when he questions propriety and uses language that I regard as unfortunate that I think he goes too far. But it is right to ask questions: there is no problem about that.

Given the criticisms that have been made, it is possible to recognise that earlier recognition of the depth of the concerns voiced about transparency and swifter action to provide details on the operation might have helped to avert the current situation, in which lack of knowledge has led to unjustified suspicion. I should also point out that, as a registered charity in receipt of Government funds, Motability deposits its accounts both with the charity commissioners and with the NAO, while MFL—the limited company—deposits accounts at Companies house. They therefore all have to be open to public scrutiny.

Much has been made of the structure of the scheme and the suggestion that partnerships have been set up to hide the movement of funds through the funding banks. That is not the case. The scheme was set up in a tax efficient and perfectly legal manner to ensure that disabled people gain the maximum benefit. I am anxious that Motability should be able robustly to deal with the criticisms that have been made and to demonstrate fully the propriety of its operation. I believe that the publication of the NAO report will provide the most appropriate opportunity for that. When it is published, I shall be more than happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about what it reveals. I presume that there will be an opportunity to discuss the matter then.

I am extremely sorry that I have not had the opportunity to say more. Had I been given more than eight minutes, I probably would have done.

Mongolia

1.30 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): It is a privilege and a pleasure to introduce a short debate on the United Kingdom's relations with Mongolia. It is a very long time since the House had the opportunity to discuss those relations—it is certainly a long time since they were discussed at such a reasonable hour. My noble Friend Lord Rees told me that there was much speculation about the Mongolian tax system during debates on Finance Bills in the 1970s but, that apart, there has been precious little parliamentary discussion of Mongolia.

However, that is not to say that there is not a significant number of hon. Members with a real knowledge of and interest in this particular subject. I became interested in Mongolia thanks to our former colleague Sir James Kilfedder, whose untimely death left such a void in those of us who knew and loved him dearly.

Mongolia is not—to adapt a phrase used by our former Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain—a faraway country of which we know little. That is far from the truth. As we speak, at this reasonable hour, darkness is descending in Ulaanbaatar. It would be perfectly possible for someone from this country to reach Mongolia by air in well under 24 hours, so it is not a faraway country, but it is a most interesting one.

Mongolia is about the size of western Europe, and its population is 2.3 million—about that of Greater Birmingham. In other words, a country the size of half our continent has a population equivalent only to that of our second principal city. It might have a small population, but it has masses of what President Kennedy used to call geography.

No country in the world has more sunshine than Mongolia. There are few clouds, at least in the physical sense, although I shall refer to some aspects of public policy which could be described as clouds. The sun shines, and the sky is blue. To the north of Mongolia lie the Arctic wastes of Siberia and its 100 million people. To the south lies the Gobi desert and Inner Mongolia, as it used to be called.

To the east is the great wall of China, Beijing and the plains and riches of China, which have so fascinated people from our continent since the time of Marco Polo. To the west is the romance and mystery of Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent. That is an enormous area of north central Asia, with which this country has long had friendly relations.

I am proud and pleased to be able to say that relations between our two countries are as warm today as they have ever been. The President of Mongolia has just made a successful visit—the first ever such visit—to this country. Along with the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young), I was privileged to be part of the fifth Round Table delegation, which, under the redoubtable leadership of my noble Friend Baroness Trumpington, visited Mongolia shortly after Easter.

This is May, and it should be springtime in Mongolia, with the equivalent of alpine flowers all over the plateau, but, for reasons that I shall identify in a moment, since our visit—but, I hope, not because of it—a terrible tragedy has befallen that country. However, I want to use this debate not to dwell on darkness but to identify some of Mongolia's many assets which should be of interest and advantage to us.

Mongolia's population is highly educated. Probably no other country has achieved such good results, per head of the population, in the school and higher education system. It was a privilege and a pleasure to me to meet people who had learned about the market economy, for example, at the university of Leningrad, and who had been able to learn something of European culture and civilisation in the somewhat unlikely institutions built in the spirit of those awful old reprobates, Walter Ulbrecht and Mr. Honecker of the former East Germany.

What we would regard as such an unpromising start has nevertheless left the Mongolian population educated, sophisticated, skilled and knowledgeable, which is a massive asset. Mongolia also had an outstanding health system, which, alas, has to some extent fallen into decline as a result of what Mongolia regarded as the immense tragedy of the collapse of the Soviet empire.

In the Soviet days, Mongolia was not a Soviet slave or captive nation, as some countries in eastern Europe felt themselves to be; rather, it was a friendly and integrated part of the Soviet world, although its economy was very dependent on mutual trade with the old Soviet Union. Therefore, the collapse of the iron curtain and the Soviet system reduced overnight the wealth of the nation by one third. Very few countries could sustain such a blow, but Mongolians, with the good humour that we would expect of them, set about introducing reform.

The World bank and the International Monetary Fund—two institutions familiar to the House—arrived in Mongolia and gave advice that the people were happy to accept, after proper consultation. Mongolia then proceeded with modernisation, liberalisation and the start of a programme of privatisation.

Of course, as the old trade links had been destroyed, and as there was no infrastructure of alternative trading routes, the blow suffered by Mongolia in the early 1990s was formidable. That is one reason why I say to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whom I welcome to his place, that I hope it may be possible for us to do more to assist Mongolia than has hitherto been possible.

Mongolia has some outstanding products of its own. The aficionados of vodka say that Mongolian vodka is the best in the world. There is no question but that its cashmere is of the highest quality. I hope that it may be possible to expand trade in those two important items between Mongolia and Great Britain.

There are other opportunities for us, and the Round Table delegation enabled us to explore some of them. I welcome the fact that the Confederation of British Industry was represented on the delegation. Much hard work was done in acquiring information and intelligence to be spread among companies in this country to enable them to recognise those opportunities.

I pay tribute to a company in my constituency, Marlec Engineering, which is the only company in this country ever to be awarded the Queen's award for industry for exports to Mongolia. The company has supplied Mongolia with wind-powered machines for generating energy.

Our relations with Mongolia are the product of hard work. I pay tribute to the Mongolian ambassador to this country, who has been here for more than a year and has worked hard to improve our relations. I also want to pay tribute to his predecessor, who was here for a number of

[Mr. William Powell]

years. I knew him well, and I was delighted to see him again in Ulaanbaatar. He is now the deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.

On the British side, I pay tribute to the wonderful work done by the non-governmental organisations. These are essentially British in character, and they are doing useful work in Mongolia. For example, the work of Save the Children in Mongolia—led by a scion of the Dukes of St. Albans—is as valuable as its work in any other part of the world. I also pay tribute to the splendid daughter of Canada who led the British team of volunteers from the Volunteer Service Overseas. There are many non-governmental ways in which British people are engaged in important and necessary work in Mongolia.

I also pay tribute to our ambassador and his excellent staff in Ulaanbaatar. At one stage, it seemed that the British embassy—opened in 1962 and the first western embassy in Ulaanbaatar—might not survive some of the periodic efforts of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to save money in our posts abroad. Fortunately, Ulaanbaatar was saved from that fate.

The work of Mr. Sloane, our ambassador—who is shortly to retire—his wife and his excellent staff has been outstanding, in both the public and the private sector. Too often, hon. Members ignore what some of our less important posts abroad do, but sometimes the staff in posts in what may rank as only minor countries do work at least as important as, if not more important than, those in the great posts of Washington, Paris, Bonn and Japan.

My plea today is that Mongolia deserves British attention, and one area in particular that I wish to stress is the know-how fund for the republics of eastern Europe. Mongolia was excluded from that fund—perhaps for good reason—but it was just as much a part of the Soviet system as Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland. It is somewhat strange that it has been excluded from the scope of the funding. But I do not want to be too technical. If for any reason the know-how fund is not an appropriate vehicle to try to assist the Mongolians, I hope that it may be possible to boost our overseas aid funding, so that Mongolia receives a higher priority than at present.

I pay tribute to the university of Leeds, which is doing excellent work in educating in our language students from Mongolia. However, there is some suggestion that Cambridge university—the world's most important university—should abandon Mongolian studies. Mongolian may not rank as the most important language in the school of oriental languages at Cambridge, but it is important that a university of the quality of Cambridge should continue to make it available. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will draw to the attention of the vice-chancellor the fact that it is the view of many hon. Members that Mongolian should be retained at Cambridge.

May I also say how important the overseas service of the BBC is? In a curious way, this country has managed to nurture the leading English language authorities in countries such as Mongolia through the work that they do for the BBC overseas service. We were blessed in Mongolia to have as one of our number a man who is undoubtedly regarded worldwide as the leading academic authority on Mongolia in the English language. He was able to acquire this skill through the work he did for the BBC overseas service. That is an important way in which we can assist Mongolia.

Finally, I wish to refer to the events in Mongolia since we left shortly after Easter. Hon. Members may be aware that some 80,000 sq km or 31,000 square miles—equivalent to an area stretching from John O'Groats to Land's End and from Milford Haven to Great Yarmouth—has been on fire. This has had a devastating effect on the country and its infrastructure, which was not the strongest in any event. The UK rapidly moved in to offer £50,000 on a bilateral basis and then through the multilateral funds to assist in the international effort to control the fires in Mongolia. But more is required, and I hope that we can give everything we can to help Mongolia at this time of maximum stress and trial.

We went in friendship, and we were received in friendship. Britain has built up friendly relations with this most excellent country, and my most fervent wish is that we continue to build upon the progress that has been made in the past decade and that we continue to look to Mongolia as a friendly, attractive and worthwhile partner in international affairs.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) for giving us an opportunity today to discuss our relations with Mongolia. Mongolia is not a country that normally receives much public attention here, inside Parliament or out, and this debate is a welcome opportunity to redress that.

Before doing so, I would first like to pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend as chairman of the British-Mongolian parliamentary group. I must also thank both him and my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Trumpington—to whom he referred—who led the delegation, and to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young), who also participated, at last month's fifth meeting of the Mongolian-British Round Table in Ulaanbaatar. I gather that it was a resounding success, and my hon. Friend confirmed that. I know that many constructive proposals for expanding our relations emerged from that meeting, and we are studying them carefully.

Since then, we have also had the pleasure of welcoming President Ochirbat to the United Kingdom on the first ever visit by a Mongolian Head of State to this country. He had an audience with Her Majesty the Queen, and discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other colleagues. I was honoured to have three meetings with him during his visit, and we all exchanged views on the ways in which Britain might best be able to help support and sustain Mongolian development. I also pay tribute to His Excellency the Mongolian ambassador, who keeps in touch with me regularly in the interests of both our countries. He, our excellent ambassador Ian Sloane, and Mr. Sloane's wife helped to make the president's visit such a success.

It is unfortunate that so little is heard here of Mongolia, because its performance in recent years has been truly remarkable. It was the first satellite of the Soviet Union, and was for 70 years among the most faithful followers of the twists and turns of Soviet politics. Yet it was the

first Asian country to throw off the yoke of communism and the shackles of central planning, to embrace the principles of democracy and establish an open market economy.

Mongolia was, under communist rule, one of the most isolated countries in the world. It is landlocked, bordered only by the Soviet Union and China, and its economy was linked only to those of Soviet bloc countries. The economic legacy of the Soviet years was to set back development of Mongolia's traditional pastoral nomadism and create ill-suited industry aimed at supplying only Soviet needs.

Energy supply in one of the earth's harshest climates was, and remains, inadequate. Communications are poor. Socially, the Soviets provided education, health and social services, which Mongolia, with a GDP per capita of less than $350 per annum, cannot sustain. Its natural resources remain to a large extent untapped. The geography of Mongolia hampers communications with the outside world. Information technology is only just beginning to make an impact, and thus the international community still knows little about the country.

That means that the courageous and determined Mongolian people have not hitherto received the credit and attention that they merit. Next month, they go to the polls to elect a Parliament freely for the second time since the collapse of communism in their country. It is important that Mongolia should continue successfully along that path, not just for the good of the Mongolian people but because a successful Mongolia, despite numerous obstacles, can be an example to other countries in the region.

Mongolia deserves our support. We can therefore take some modest pride in the fact that the Mongolian parties are looking to our own political parties for advice and support. I know that, with the backing of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, some support has already been forthcoming; I also know that Mongolia's Parliament, the State Great Hural, has extended an invitation to the British-Mongolian parliamentary group to visit the country. If such a visit were possible, I am confident that it would be very well received in Mongolia.

Progress in introducing democracy to Mongolia has been impressive, and the efforts to rebuild the economy following the end of Soviet aid have been even more so. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant a loss to Mongolia of subsidies estimated at some 30 per cent. of gross domestic product.

This enormous country, with its small population—graphically and accurately described by my hon. Friend—decrepit infrastructure, lack of managerial know-how and meagre financial resources, faces many obstacles, particularly in its bid to achieve self-sustaining economic growth. As a landlocked country, it is entirely dependent on the good will of its two large neighbours for trade and communication links. But, with admirable self-discipline, the Mongolians have followed closely the advice of both the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. As a result, positive economic growth was restored in 1994, and last year growth increased to an impressive 6.3 per cent.

The prospects for this year were brighter still, but the recent widespread fires—to which my hon. Friend referred at the end of his speech—have caused considerable damage, and have been a bitter setback to Mongolia's recovery efforts. It is not yet clear that the worst of the fires are over. They have taken a terrible physical toll: the environment has suffered enormous damage, with perhaps a quarter of the forest cover destroyed, and the long-term damage to Mongolia's recovery will be severe. Britain was one of the first countries to respond to Mongolia's requests for international help in fighting the fires, and our contribution, although small, has been one of the largest to date. We stand ready to consider further requests for assistance.

President Ochirbat's visit last month demonstrated the warmth of our bilateral relations. They have never been better. We were the first western country to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia, in 1961, and to open a resident embassy in Ulaanbaatar, in 1963. The Mongolians have not forgotten that, or the signal that it sends of our support for their independence.

The cultural links established through some of our universities go back at least as far, and were recognised by the President, who visited Leeds university while he was here. Indeed, there is a link between Ulaanbaatar and the city of Leeds, strengthened this year by both the President's visit and that of the Lord Mayor of Leeds to Mongolia.

We have also made a significant contribution to helping Mongolia in its transition. Through our bilateral aid programme, we have provided about £3 million of assistance since 1992. The European Union provides around 8 million ecu each year, of which we contribute almost one fifth.

British support does not come just from the Government. Despite the problems of distance and difficulty of supply, some British companies have entered into joint ventures, and others have won contracts under multilateral aid arrangements. Investment by OECD countries is still very modest, but Britain is among the leaders. British aid agencies, such as the Save the Children Fund and Voluntary Service Overseas, are performing heroic work in Mongolia in helping to tackle poverty.

One effect of the Soviet era was to create a climate of aid dependency in Mongolia. One of the aims of British aid, whether bilateral, through the European Union or through the multilateral aid donors, is to encourage Mongolia into a can-do attitude. Our efforts are therefore aimed at giving the Mongolians the skills and knowledge need to use their own resources, manage their economy and enhance their position on the international stage.

Mongolia's needs are great, and Britain's contribution is targeted on the areas where the Mongolians have themselves told us it is most valuable. They recognise that a key to success in the modern world is the English language, and that is one area in which they are especially keen to have help from us. It is natural that we should give such help, and it is a particular focus of attention in our bilateral aid programme.

We have already provided English language teachers and BBC English programmes for Mongolian television, and we will continue to provide support for specialist English language teaching, while Foreign Office and Overseas Development Administration scholarships enable some of the brightest Mongolians to come to Britain for further study.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

We help in many other ways. In view of the importance of livestock to Mongolia's economy, we have donated remote sensing equipment to enable herds and grazing patterns to be more effectively monitored. The Ministry of Agriculture is now arranging extra training in the use of that equipment, as well as considering ways of helping to develop horticulture. Mongolia has a young population and cannot meet all its educational needs, but, in co-operation with the Save the Children Fund and within the framework of the Mongolian Government's own plans, we are helping to strengthen its pre-school system.

My hon. Friend raised the question of extending the know-how fund to Mongolia. Indeed, he recently wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary about the issue. Unlike the countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which receive technical assistance from us through the know-how fund, Mongolia has its own bilateral aid programme. That reflects the particular pressing needs it faced at the time when the aid programme was established.

Mongolia was badly hit by the break-up of the Soviet Union. In particular, the need to pay for imports in hard currency rather than transferable roubles soon exhausted its foreign exchange reserves. Whereas all our aid to the other former Soviet bloc countries has been in the form of technical assistance, the bulk of our recent aid to Mongolia has therefore been in the direct provision of badly needed lubricants for Mongolia's industries, the purchase of which would otherwise have been a severe drain on its very limited foreign exchange.

However, as Mongolia's economy has turned round, so its needs are changing. Our bilateral programme will seek to provide assistance in areas where it is most needed. While the financial constraints on our aid programme limit our ability to increase our assistance, our technical co-operation programme will continue.

The Mongolians have also asked us to resume export credit guarantee cover. We are at present reviewing our position on that, although our decision will have to take account of Mongolia's arrangements with the IMF. Following the latest meeting of the Round Table and President Ochirbat's visit, we are also considering other ways in which we can help.

The President kindly invited me to visit Ulaanbaatar, and I intend to do so before too long. That will enable me to see for myself the challenges that Mongolia faces, and to discuss with its leaders ways in which we may help. I know that concern has been expressed about the future of Mongolian studies at British universities. We are conscious of the long and proud tradition of those studies, and are investigating, as a matter of priority, ways in which to ensure that they can be maintained.

Mongolia deserves our support and encouragement for the democratic and economic reforms that it is pursuing. We have helped, and will continue to help, Mongolia in the widest possible way within the available resources. We hope that other countries will join us in doing that, and in encouraging Mongolia to play a full role in the international community. We look forward in the near future to welcoming it to membership of the World Trade Organisation.

We are pleased that our support is being reflected by an upsurge in Mongolian interest in Britain. The number of Mongolians wishing to visit Britain to study, make contact with our institutions, learn our way of doing things or just look around continues to grow. The Mongolians see their country as small and somewhat vulnerable, and therefore value the presence of our embassy in Ulaanbaatar.

To cope with the growing interest, we are extending our embassy there. Given the extreme harshness of the Mongolian winter—which prevents any outdoor building work for about two thirds of the year—and the absence of suitable equipment and materials locally, even such a seemingly modest activity becomes a major task; and the fact that we are performing that task should be seen as a sign of our strong commitment to Mongolia. My hon. Friend will understand why do-it-yourself is one of the talents required of our ambassador in Ulaanbaatar.

It is in the interests of the world at large for Mongolia to remain an independent, democratic state with its unique culture and contribution. Our diplomatic presence, our continuing aid—both bilateral and through the international financial institutions—and our modest but growing trade and investment, as well as the realisation by some British travellers that Mongolia is really worth visiting, are all symptoms of a healthy and developing relationship.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 6 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training Opportunities

1. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to extend training opportunities for unemployed 18 to 25–year–olds. [29089]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): The Department will continue to offer and support a wide range of opportunities for unemployed 18 to 25-year-olds, including specialist provision for those requiring basic skills training.

Mrs. Prentice: Is the Minister aware that that is the one group for whom unemployment has risen in the past few years? What does he have to say to young people in my constituency, where long-term unemployment has risen by a staggering 64 per cent? Is it not the case that they really are the lost generation, whose hopes and aspirations will never be achieved under this Government because, for them, it is still hurting and they are still not working?

Mr. Paice: I congratulate the hon. Lady on being able to read—obviously education does work for some. We are used to the Opposition twisting statistics, but it is relatively unusual to present statistics that are downright untrue. That age group has enjoyed a 10 per cent. fall in unemployment in the past 12 months, and a drop of 36 per cent. since the peak. It is an important group. That is why the Government give it special priority and access to our training programmes. Incidentally, the hon. Lady might like to take the matter up with the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who criticised the Government only this February for giving that group priority.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that unemployment among 18 to 25-year-olds would be adversely affected by the introduction of the national minimum wage? Does he also agree that the problems of that group have been exacerbated by the failure of our education system, sometimes, to send them from school with the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic and that that problem was created by the late and unlamented Inner London education authority?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right to point out that, where it exists—we must never ignore the fact that young people are still looking for work, and we are trying to help them—much of that unemployment stems from a lack of adequate education. That is why the Government have carried out many reforms, which my hon. Friend has rightly supported, and it is why we are carrying out further reforms as a result of the Dearing report to ensure that all those young people have access to the right education, through compulsory schooling and beyond, to equip them for the workplace.

Mr. Byers: The Minister speaks of figures. Is he aware that one in four of 18 to 24-year-olds in his constituency is out of work? Does he agree that special measures are needed to help that age group because the training needs of 20-year-olds differ from those of 40-year-olds? When will action replace neglect? Is not it time that the Government brought hope to the lost generation of young people by providing them with the training opportunities that they need to improve their prospects of finding employment?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman represents the lost generation of Labour Members who will never be Ministers. The training for work programme is flexible enough to respond to the needs of individuals. It is not a question of laying something down for 40-year-olds or for 20-year-olds; it is a flexible programme that can be adapted by the training provider to meet an individual's needs. If the hon. Gentleman cares about this age group, how can he support policies such as the minimum wage, the social chapter and the withdrawal of child benefit, all of which would destroy opportunities for advancement?

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that more than 100 18 to 24-year-olds in my constituency would lose their jobs if the Government were to adopt a national minimum wage and we were to suffer the same level of youth unemployment as France—28 per cent? Even more young people would lose their jobs if we suffered the same level of youth unemployment—38 per cent.—as Spain, which also has a minimum wage. How many training for work, youth training and modern apprenticeship places have been provided by the Government for the coming year?

Mr. Paice: About 250,000 youth training places will be provided in the coming year and 60,000-odd modern apprenticeships will be available. My hon. Friend is right; we need to consider the impact of the minimum wage not only in our constituencies but in those countries where one is practised. That is what is so staggering about Labour's policy. It knows what is happening in other European countries, and wants to copy their policies despite the fact that they would lead to far worse unemployment.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

2. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about the nursery voucher scheme. [29092]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): There have been a number of representations on all aspects of the nursery education voucher scheme.

Ms Quin: Has the Minister had time to study the debate in the other place earlier this week in which, apart from the Minister, there was universal condemnation of the nursery voucher scheme? Is he aware that, in the Secretary of State's county, the scheme is described as "excessively bureaucratic"? Given the universal hostility to it, is it not time for a major Government rethink of nursery education provision?

Mr. Squire: I look forward to reading the account of the debate in the other place. I always listen with care to what their Lordships say. When the hon. Lady refers to Norfolk, the county of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, she must recognise that the take-up of vouchers is now 96 per cent, which suggests that her allegations about bureaucracy are overstated. We are witnessing in phase 1, and in due course will see with the second phase across the country, an increase in the number of quality places. That should be good news for everyone.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend accept that much misinformation is circulating about nursery vouchers? No doubt we shall hear some of it in later questions. Will he confirm that nursery vouchers will not damage existing local education authority provision, nursery education provision for three-year-olds or existing admission arrangements?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will remember that I have sought, in my modest way, to make public some of the myths and misconceptions that have been spread, especially by the Labour party. To take up two of his points, there is no reason why the education of three-year-olds should be affected. They are not covered by a deduction of local authority funding. Secondly, local authorities remain free to continue to spend, as most of them do, above the level of the voucher value because that money also is not affected.

Mrs. Mahon: Whatever happened to choice? Has the Minister received representations from head teachers, teachers, parents, school governors and just about everyone involved in education, including Conservative councillors, in Halifax who want the right to keep their own, excellent, nursery education? Why do not they have the right to choose?

Mr. Squire: It is surprising that the hon. Lady delivered her question without a trace of a smile, because it is quintessentially the existence of the voucher, which she and her hon. Friends object to, that is creating choice. Any parent, whether in her local authority area or others, who is satisfied with present local authority provision has simply to ensure that they take up that provision when the child is four. The voucher ensures that there will be greater choice throughout the country, and that, as I said a moment ago, should be good news. If the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends would listen to what is happening, they would be better informed.

General Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations

3. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the benefits of GCSE examinations and of their future. [29094]

Mr. Paice: Since its introduction in 1988, the GCSE has been successful in raising the levels of performance and attainment of pupils of all abilities. The Government are committed to the GCSE as the principal means of assessing pupils at the age of 16.

Mr. Booth: May I inform my hon. Friend that the question on the Order Paper was drafted by the customers of the education system—some children in one of the most excellent schools in north London?

As a result of the main question, and what I am about to ask, will my hon. Friend accept that Conservative policy for the GCSE is soundly based on an excellent curriculum and on a desire to train children and prepare them for life, whereas the policies of the Labour party are divided and dither over the curriculum and the GCSE? Neither attitude would prepare children for anything.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right to identify the question as coming from the most important group of people—the customers, the young people who are undergoing our education system—and to demonstrate the Labour party's U-turns on education policy during the past few years. Labour Members have opposed every reform that we have introduced but, ultimately, they begin to welcome some. Labour Members criticise us for the poor results in tables. If they had had their way, we would not even have had those tables, from which we can work out the improvement that needs to be made.

Mr. Barry Jones: Why are there no jobs for our school leavers?

Mr. Paice: How dreary. The reality, as I said a few minutes ago, is that unemployment among young people has fallen substantially—by 10 per cent. in the past year and by 36 per cent. since the peak. There are more and more jobs for young people. What really matters is what Labour would put in the way of those jobs. The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for a long while, and still he espouses policies that would destroy jobs for young people.

Grammar Schools

4. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils are currently being educated in grammar schools. [29095]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): Approximately 125,000 pupils are being taught in maintained grammar schools in England.

Mr. Dunn: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members wish that the figure were 10 times that number? Many of us cannot forget that, in terms of educational provision, the inner city has become a nightmare for many of our young people because of the control and ideology of the Labour party. Labour has denied many young people a chance to have a real education in the inner city; that is why it is not fit to govern.

Mrs. Shephard: As my hon. Friend knows, I intend to publish a White Paper in June which, among other things, will propose increased selection for those schools where parents, governors and heads wish it. In that way, we shall enable schools to build on their strengths, to establish distinctive identities and to increase choice and diversity. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said it all: whatever happened to choice? We know what would happen to choice if the Labour party ever formed a Government: it would be abolished.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister confirm the Government's support for comprehensive schools? Is she aware that, over the years, many thousands of youngsters from comprehensive schools have gone on to considerable achievement? Those students would have been unable to pursue such opportunities had selection continued. Is she aware that the Government appear to be moving backwards, and against the comprehensive principle, in support of the selection principle, which has served this country badly?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government believe in a broad spectrum of schools in the maintained sector, and that is what our policies have achieved. We have grant-maintained schools, LEA schools, grammar schools, non-selective schools, specialist schools and colleges, city technology colleges and Church schools. Labour Members seem to be opposed to such diversity. It seems that they would seek to march forward to the 1960s and impose only one kind of school on everyone—but for a few of their Front-Bench team.

Sir Patrick Cormack: How many pupils are currently being taught English grammar? Would not the level of spoken and written English in this country go up appreciably if the old grammar school standards applied throughout the country?

Mrs. Shephard: All pupils in our schools are currently being taught English grammar. Their achievement is regularly inspected and examined. They are tested at the ages of seven, 11 and 14. I know that my hon. Friend has high standards in these matters. He always expresses himself admirably. It will take a little time before all our pupils reach his standard, but we intend to get there.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of providers participating in the pilot phase of the nursery voucher scheme have not previously accepted four-year-olds. [29096]

Mr. Robin Squire: Forty private and voluntary sector providers did not have four-year-olds on roll at the time of applying to join the nursery voucher scheme but had the capacity to provide for them.

Mr. Griffiths: The Minister has not told me what proportion of providers that is—I will assume that it is minute. Does it not show that the nursery voucher scheme is a vast waste of money on administration and bureaucracy? In relation to the pilot schemes, more than 25 per cent. more places could have been provided if the money had been given to local authorities.

Mr. Squire: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the exact proportion that he seeks because I do not have that information. There are new providers in the private and voluntary sector, and I should have thought that he would welcome that, particularly as he knows—he is a member of the relevant Standing Committee—that checks are being built in to ensure high standards. As for his comment about money being wasted on bureaucracy, he should also know from his Standing Committee membership that, of the £20 million that is estimated to cover the operation, administration and inspection of the scheme next year, the vast proportion will be spent on inspection. I should have thought that he would join me in welcoming the fact that all providers will be inspected.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the nursery voucher scheme is the only means of ensuring a diversity of choice for parents in nursery provision? Does he agree that without the scheme, the only choice parents would have would be between LEA provision and nothing?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will know that we are awaiting precise details of any Opposition proposals. Despite the passage of legislation through the House, we still await that information. There is no doubt that the voucher gives parents a greater say than does the present system, and it should be welcomed on that ground alone.

Teacher Training (Science Graduates)

6. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase the number of applications from science graduates for training for teaching; and if she will make a statement. [29097]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): We have introduced a priority subject recruitment scheme, being run by the Teacher Training Agency, which should attract more good students to train as teachers in key subjects such as science. The TTA's other promotional activities also place particular emphasis on science.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Minister believe that the Teacher Training Agency will reach its target of training 3,700 science graduates as teachers this year? Does he believe that there will be more science teachers in the classroom next year, taking into account those who will be promoted out of the classroom, retire, change careers or leave the profession because of disillusionment? Are we not facing a crisis in science teaching in schools, which is due in part to disillusionment with the Government as a result of their lowering teachers' status over the years?

Mr. Forth: That hysterical outburst—[*Laughter.*]—is uncharacteristic of the hon. Gentleman. I am told that there are 46 vacancies nationwide for physics, chemistry, biology and other science teachers, which does not suggest a crisis of the proportions implied by the hon. Gentleman. However, the Department and I share his concern to do everything that we can to guarantee the future supply of science teachers and to strengthen the teaching of science in schools. The Teacher Training Agency is doing several different things in that area. For example, it is considering how it might develop the licensed teacher scheme to attract mature applicants to science teaching. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is an imaginative approach that could bear fruit. The School Teachers Review Body will also examine the question of the supply of science teachers when undertaking its annual consideration of pay skills. Those

and the other measures that have been implemented will ensure that there is no worsening of the current position of only 46 vacancies nationwide.

Mr. Butcher: The problem is that most of the time that graduates spend in teacher training college is a complete waste. Although we have introduced measures to test pupils and the level of output in schools, should we not also consider introducing a core curriculum for teachers, particularly for junior and infant trainee teachers, in numeracy and literacy? Graduates should be taught not simply what to teach, but how to teach it. Recent studies have highlighted tragic levels of illiteracy among young people in our inner cities which are caused by poor teachers who do not know how to teach—and who have not been trained to teach—reading.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend, characteristically, puts his finger on a very important point. An important part of the remit of the Teacher Training Agency, working with the Office for Standards in Education—which is helping us increasingly to understand some of the problems that my hon. Friend has highlighted—is to provide the information that we need to quantify the nature of the problem and to go ahead and deal with it.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we must ensure that teachers and those who are in teacher training have the tools that they need to do the job properly. As well as helping us to identify problems in schools and with pupils in the classroom, Ofsted is working to identify the needs of teachers. The Teacher Training Agency can then bring about the necessary improvements in that area.

Mr. Bryan Davies: I ask the Minister, calmly and without hysteria, whether he agrees that, to safeguard the number of teachers of science in the future, we must take seriously the Dearing proposals to broaden the post-16 curriculum. We must ensure that more students continue to study science beyond the age of 16 and are well prepared to enter higher education to study that subject.

Mr. Forth: I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman's constructive point. The whole thrust for some years—starting with the national curriculum—has been to ensure that all pupils not only gain a grasp of science, but develop an enthusiasm for it from an early age. We hope and expect that more children will want to continue their science studies in secondary school and beyond. The basic curriculum, Sir Ron Dearing's work to develop it post-16 and developments beyond that are designed to achieve that objective, among others. I am happy to share the objectives that the hon. Gentleman sketched.

Deregulation

7. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to promote deregulation in respect of education and employment. [29098]

Mr. Forth: We will continue to resist the imposition of unnecessary burdens on employers, such as the social chapter and a national minimum wage, which have contributed to unemployment averaging 11 per cent. throughout the European Union.

Mr. Steen: Although the Secretary of State gets high marks in her end-of-term report for effort and achievement, I hope that she agrees that her performance on deregulation requires a little more attention. Only six paragraphs in a 250-page report on education and employment covered deregulation. Will my right hon. Friend have a word with all her Ministers and find new initiatives to help to support the Prime Minister's excellent initiative to deregulate faster, quicker and better?

Mr. Forth: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's unremitting efforts to ensure that the Government's stated objective of deregulation is adhered to and thoroughly prosecuted in every Department. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State watches tirelessly over her team of Ministers to ensure that they share in that objective. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that we have done rather well over the years in creating a deregulated labour market—which is reflected in our performance in employment and unemployment compared with our European partners in particular.

As to education, I suspect that we are bound in many ways to be a regulating Department—precisely because we are responsible for the well-being of so many young people in achieving a successful education. I could read out examples of some of the regulations that have been produced by my Department over the past year, but I shall not—I shall share them with my hon. Friend later. We make every reasonable effort to reduce regulation in education, but that must be balanced against our duty to protect standards and the well-being of pupils.

Mr. Corbett: I presume that the Minister and the Secretary of State are seeking to expand selective and divisive grammar school education under the dogmatic banner of deregulation. Is not it the case that if every town is to have a grammar school, there will be many more secondary modern schools? Is not it also the case that picking winners

"means plenty of losers as well"?

Will the Minister confirm that those words came from Mr. Demitri Coryton, who chaired the Conservative Education Association?

Mr. Forth: Only the hon. Gentleman's twisted logic would have led him in the direction that he seeks to take the House. I suspect that he raised the matter in that way because he has hit upon one of the few areas—education—in which the Labour party seems to have any policy, and that is to do away with selection and choice. That is one of the few things of which we can be certain in respect of Labour's education policy—no selection and no choice. Everything else is either a pale shadow of Government policies or under review.

Mr. Sykes: When the Minister next goes to the Council of Ministers—if he does—will he try to have a Europewide ban imposed on the 48-hour week, which has been scientifically proven to destroy jobs in Europe?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has hit on a truth that has been obvious to us for some time but which we have as yet been unable to persuade our EU partners to see. It is that if we arbitrarily interfere in the working of the labour

market in the way my hon. Friend describes, the almost certain result will be a loss of jobs and competitiveness in the EU market as compared with our global competitors. We understand that; it is why we are enjoying a period of success in the creation of jobs and a reduction of unemployment. I fear that if our partners cannot and will not see that truth, they will drag themselves down competitively, and ultimately they will drag us down too.

Mr. Meacher: If the Minister thinks that deregulation has been so successful why, since 1980, for every job created in Britain 17 have been created in France and 52 in Germany, yet neither France nor Germany has a deregulated labour market and both have a national minimum wage? If deregulation has been such a success, why were more jobs created in Britain in the regulated 1970s than have been in the deregulated 1990s? Why are there now 1 million fewer jobs in Britain than there were the day the Prime Minister took office? Is it not obvious that deregulation is simply a passport to short-term, hire-and-fire job insecurity, whereas what is really needed is long-term investment and commitment?

Mr. Forth: Something that has puzzled me for the past few days has suddenly become clear. This is the same hon. Gentleman who was recently quoted as demanding the restoration of the old trade union powers of the 1970s—a period to which he now looks back with such nostalgia. He, one of the Labour party's prominent speakers on the subject, wants us to go back to the 1970s and all that they meant. Whereas I used to think that the Labour party had very few policies, I can now see that this is one area on which its policies are developing under the hon. Gentleman's influence.

Teaching Standards

8. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she proposes to improve teaching standards in schools. [29099]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have introduced a wide range of measures, from professional qualifications for head teachers to in-depth reform of initial and in-service teacher training.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the recent Ofsted report on reading showed that it is not funding or class size that determines educational success, but the quality of teaching in our schools? Does she welcome the new teacher training rules, which will concentrate far more on classroom experience?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes, the recent Ofsted report on standards of reading in Islington, Tower Hamlets and Southwark raised serious doubts about the quality of the teaching methods used, about in-service training and about the role of head teachers. It is sad that the initial reaction of those responsible was to accuse the report of political bias, instead of expressing concern for the education of the children in their care. Obviously, in-service training of teachers is important; but just as important is initial teacher training—my hon. Friend is right about that—and inspections of initial teacher training by Ofsted are revealing some interesting results.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is little point in raising teaching standards if children are encouraged to miss school? If so, does she share my concern about the material sent out by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority for this year's key stage 2 standard assessment tasks reading test? In it, children are encouraged to follow the wrong example in a passage in which Uncle Jim persuades mum to allow the children to miss school so as to go for a ride in his shiny new motor car.

Mrs. Shephard: That sounds like a description of Liberal education policy.

Mr. Key: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we could make a good start to raising teaching standards by saying thank you to the tens of thousands of teachers who, with professionalism and dedication, do so well in our schools? While we are at it, why not say thank you to them for teaching the hundreds of thousands of children who are about to sit their public examinations—including my daughter Sophie?

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to hear that news from my hon. Friend. Of course we owe a debt—as does society—to successful, committed teachers. It is indeed a shame that occasionally they are let down by local education authorities that seek to make excuses for them instead of helping them to achieve more.

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps the Secretary of State will agree that one advantage of Uncle Jim's car is that, by taking a child out of the classroom, it improves the pupil:teacher ratio? Is it not a scandal that yesterday's figures revealed a further worsening of the pupil:teacher ratio and that, in an enlightened moment, the chief inspector of schools said in his annual report that small class sizes are of benefit in the early years of primary education? Will she therefore apologise to teachers and parents throughout the country for what has just been revealed—that, for the first time, more than 40 per cent. of our primary schools have classes of over 30, that classes of over 40 have risen by almost 50 per cent. since the Government took office and that we now have 1.6 million children in those excessively large classes, making it difficult to teach the basics that are the essential tools of raising standards?

Mrs. Shephard: Provisional figures on teacher numbers show that the position is largely unchanged. I remind the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that there is no clear connection between class size and achievement in the classroom, as has been confirmed repeatedly by the chief inspector of schools. I further remind the hon. Gentleman that in Labour-controlled Hackney there was one teacher for every eight pupils, yet the education provided was so deplorable that the school had to be closed. We heard not a word of condemnation from Opposition Members of that disgraceful state of affairs.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that parents recognise that the Government have ensured that teaching standards in schools have improved? Would she

be surprised to hear that Labour's education policy has been condemned by a former teacher, who recently became the chair of the new Blackpool Labour local government committee, as a "Conservative copycat document" and said that most left-wing teachers agreed with her. Is that not another example of splits within the Labour party on education?

Mrs. Shephard: That is indeed interesting news from Blackpool. Of course parents are well aware that Opposition Members have spent much of the past decade or so automatically opposing every measure that the Government have introduced to improve standards and, sadly, for many parents that legacy lives on in Labour town halls up and down the country. Examples include Islington, where GCSE results are the worst in the country, Tower Hamlets, which has the worst truancy, and Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire, where 11-year-olds were the only ones in the country who were not allowed to take national tests last year.

Access Initiative

9. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the success of the access initiative; and what provisions have been made for its continued funding. [29100]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): Some 800 mainstream schools will benefit from schools access initiative projects in 1996-97 to improve access to the curriculum for disabled pupils. We shall consider shortly the position for 1997-98.

Mr. Steinberg: I thank the Minister and congratulate the Government on introducing the access initiative with the National Union of Teachers and Scope, which initiated it. Has the Minister analysed the scheme in depth? Does she know in which schools the money was spent? Does she know how the money was spent and whether the projects were successful? If she has not carried out a careful analysis of the scheme, will she undertake to arrange for the Department to do so? Will she give the House a guarantee that the scheme will continue and that money will be put into local education authorities so that more schools can benefit from the access initiative?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind congratulations, which I accept on behalf of the Government. We have put almost £10 million into the schools access initiative, which will help to provide better access for disabled pupils. Under the Education Act 1993, schools must report every two years on their access arrangements. In 1995, an audit showed that disabled access varies widely from area to area. That is why we have put money into the initiative. We shall carry out another audit in 1997, which we expect to show increased accessibility.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

10. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provisions have been made to restrict the profits that can be made by Capita for administration of the nursery voucher scheme. [29101]

Mrs. Gillan: Capita Managed Services Ltd. was awarded the contract to administer phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme through a competitive tender. That process ensures that the successful contactor offers the best value for money.

Mr. Davies: Does the Minister accept that head teachers in my constituency are concerned that public funds will go to private profits, while nursery provision in their schools faces the threat of disruption as a result of the introduction of vouchers next year? Does she accept that it is important that every three and four-year-old in this country has the opportunity of nursery provision? That will cost a great deal of money. Instead of gimmicks such as the scheme, would it not be better to ensure that proper provision is made through education authorities, funded, if necessary, by general taxation?

Mrs. Gillan: I am ashamed that Opposition Members have still not grasped the fact that the nursery voucher scheme is proving a great success. At every stage, the Opposition have tried to cast doubt on the scheme because they have nothing better to put in its place. Capita has successfully implemented phase 1 of the scheme. In fact, a report produced by the National Childrens Bureau, which was published in March, said:

> "All four authorities felt their relationship with Capita was good. When problems had arisen, they had been solved. When mistakes were made, they had been put right quickly."

There is certainly no need to impose a restriction on profits, since the competitive tendering process ensures that profits are not excessive.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Are not all parents and children aware of what is value for money and sound education? All concerned will be watching. Should we not remember that children are as diverse between the ages of three to five as they are at any later age? The diverse provision that the nursery education voucher scheme will inspire will therefore be valuable. If primary schools continue to attract children to their nurseries as they do now, they will lose nothing.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The voucher scheme pursues our policy of choice and diversity in all areas of education. The contractor for phase 1 was chosen specifically on the value for money and quality of services offered. The quality of Capita's proposals exceeded those of the other shortlisted candidates.

Mr. Stevenson: Capita continues to cream off its profits, but is the Minister aware that my constituents are concerned about the madcap scheme? If the Minister is serious in her projection that more nursery places will be available as a result of the scheme, will she give my constituents some assessment of how many extra places will be provided in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire? Is not the scheme another bureaucratic, expensive and Government-inspired education red herring?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman must do his homework before he comes into this classroom. There are already 300 extra places in the phase 1 areas. I am really rather tired, as I am sure is the House, of the Opposition continually trying to cast slurs on Capita. The Capita

group is the largest provider of managed services to the public sector. It is used to working with local education authorities and is responsible particularly for the SIMS software package, which is used by more than half the LEAs. The Opposition just cannot stand the scheme proving to be a great success.

Education Services (Inspection)

11. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to set up a system of inspection of local education authorities in respect of their delivery of education services. [29102]

Mr. Robin Squire: On 7 May, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that she would examine whether to extend Ofsted's powers to inspect local education authorities' monitoring and support services for schools. A voluntary LEA-Ofsted exercise is under way.

Mrs. Lait: Will my hon. Friend try hard to pass on the message to my right hon. Friend that her visit to Hastings and Rye last Friday was much appreciated? She opened Filsham Valley school and saw the effectiveness of East Sussex education authority. Will he ensure that East Sussex is invited to participate in Ofsted's voluntary monitoring exercise so that we can see the increase in standards required to ensure that we improve our position in the tables from 80th for A-levels back to the top?

Mr. Squire: I am delighted to hear that I can add Hastings to the parts of the country that have benefited from and welcomed a visit by my right hon. Friend on her travels around the country. On the substance of my hon. Friend's question, she is clearly right to recognise that local education authorities can play a significant role in helping schools to raise standards, not least through the quality of their advice and by, for example, encouraging schools to set challenging performance targets. I will certainly look at my hon. Friend's authority although, as she said, she referred to a voluntary activity. A couple of authorities are already involved and I hope that others will get involved in the near future.

Mr. Madden: Who is responsible for inspecting Ofsted? Will the Minister confirm that it would be prudent for Ofsted to secure the services of inspectors before announcing inspections of schools? Does he remember that that was not done for the mass inspection of nine schools in my constituency? The inspections have been delayed by months, causing considerable anxiety and difficulty for the teaching staff and casting considerable doubt on the inspection reports, whenever they are received.

Mr. Squire: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman added the last part of his question; I would otherwise have some sympathy with the position that he described. It is, of course, regrettable when planned inspections do not take place. Although that applies to a relatively small proportion of all inspections, I join the hon. Gentleman in regretting it when it happens. I hope that he will join me in welcoming the fact that with well over 7,000 inspections completed since Ofsted was created, the net effect has been to drive up standards in our primary and secondary schools, to get heads and governing bodies to look more than ever before at the standard of education that is delivered in their schools and, in places, to get them to make a significant improvement.

School Standards

12. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met representatives of the Office for Standards in Education to discuss standards in schools. [29104]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Ministers and officials regularly meet Her Majesty's chief inspector and Ofsted officials to discuss issues related to education standards in schools.

Mr. Forman: When my right hon. Friend last had a chance to meet Mr. Christopher Woodhead, the chief inspector, was she made aware of the fact that he is a distinguished alumnus of Wallington county grammar school for boys in my constituency? He recently visited that school to open an excellent new science block containing four laboratories, which will be invaluable in raising standards of science and will thus set an example to all the good schools in my constituency.

Mrs. Shephard: I was not aware that the chief inspector is a former pupil of Wallington county grammar school. He is certainly a very distinguished ex-pupil and I am delighted that the school is doing so well.

Ms Estelle Morris: Is not the real problem in educational standards that the gap between the children who achieve and those who do not is growing wider and wider? Will the Secretary of State confirm that last year the number of young people leaving our schools with no qualifications at all rose to one in 12? Will she accept that that is a result of Government policies? The Government are prepared to give opportunities and resources to the few, but ignore the needs of the rest of the students.

Mrs. Shephard: Of course there is always more to do on standards. I advise the hon. Lady to read carefully about Ofsted's work in the various reports that we have had this year. They make it absolutely clear that there is no simple correlation between resources and pupil achievement. I remind her—though not necessarily blame her, because she is a fairly new Member of Parliament—that we would not know anything about the performance of the education system had it been left to Labour Members, who opposed every measure that we put in place to measure it.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one sure way of reducing education standards in schools is by encouraging students to leave at the age of 16? Is not that exactly what would happen if new Labour's teenage tax was introduced—that every family with children would lose at least £560 every year?

Mrs. Shephard: It is indeed extraordinary that the contribution of Labour Members to encouraging young people to stay on at school is to tax their parents.

Schools (Writing Materials)

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the overall provision of writing materials in schools in the United Kingdom. [29105]

Mr. Forth: We have provided an extra £774 million for education this year. The provision of writing materials, as for all resources in schools, is a matter for individual local authorities and for schools.

Mr. Skinner: Have we reached the sorry state of affairs in our schools when literally thousands of schools are having to run jumble sales and all the rest of it to provide books and other materials? Is the Minister aware that in Tideswell in Derbyshire, for example, local firms now have to sponsor the supply of toilet paper for the school lavatory? Is he aware that some toddlers in Jamaica have clubbed together their pocket money to send pencils to kids in another school in Derbyshire? After 17 years of Tory rule, a third-world country is bailing out school kids in Britain.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his typically reflective and considered question. Surely that is a classic example of the utter failure of Derbyshire local education authority to order its priorities so as to provide the most basic materials to its schools. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will go back to his constituency and stir up his constituents to demand that the local education authority reorders its priorities, stops spending money on such things as nuclear-free zones and gets some pencils into the classroom.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that schools that have been given grant-maintained status are finding it extremely effective to manage their own affairs, and that in very few, if any, cases are there examples such as that quoted by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Has not grant-maintained status, in giving schools the opportunity to run themselves and manage their own budgets, been a great bonus? The examples of Kettleshulme St. James school and the Mottram St. Andrew junior school in my constituency—which have had to have extensions since they were granted grant-maintained status—prove what I have said.

Mr. Forth: I readily pay tribute to the schools in my hon. Friend's constituency, which prove beyond peradventure his point about grant-maintained schools. When we allow schools to order their priorities, rarely if ever do they get into the type of difficulties alleged by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—which must be laid squarely at the door of the local education authority for failing to provide enough money to its schools. By contrast, if we direct funds at grant-maintained schools and allow them to order their priorities, they have all the materials that they need in their classrooms.

Secondary School League Tables

14. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she has received in favour of the publication of secondary school league tables in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [29106]

Mrs. Gillan: We receive many representations on school performance tables. Research shows that more than three quarters of parents choosing a secondary school for their children support the publication of such information.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does not the Government's near obsession with league tables create a great deal of difficulty for those who are socially and perhaps also educationally deprived? Is this not a very divisive policy? Is the Minister aware of the recent concerns of the national association of therapeutic education, which stated that an ever increasing number of children have been marginalised from the mainstream system? Is not this truly a divisive policy that has no place in a civilised society?

Mrs. Gillan: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am afraid that he will just have to get used to the idea that performance tables are here to stay. There are clear expectations among parents, students and the public that such information will continue to be provided. I cannot understand why some people wish to deny parents valuable information about their children's progress. Secondary performance tables inform choice, strengthen accountability and raise standards for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Mr. Stephen: I welcome performance tables, but is it not remarkable that although the Government now provide more money per pupil than ever before in the nation's history, education results in so many parts of the country have been so poor? Could it be something to do with the fact that although central Government have to take the responsibility, education is delivered mainly by left-wing education authorities, which are more interested in social engineering than in education?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The purpose of performance tables is that they enable us to study the progress made in schools so that we can ascertain where performance needs to be improved. Indeed, we recently consulted on the 1996 tables, and decisions on the new basis of the tables with probably very minor changes will be made in June.

Mr. O'Hara: Is not it a fact that crude league tables such as those supported by the Government are not only useless but possibly misleading if they ignore value added? They certainly do not help parents to make informed choices; indeed, they mislead parents into making uninformed choices. Does not the Minister recognise that, useful though league tables are, we must ensure that full information if provided to parents, as the Labour party has always advocated? Does she accept that if they do not provide full information, the tables proposed by the Government will be as useful as those that would put the Minister in the same league as Sally Gunnell for running a 440 yd hurdle race?

Mrs. Gillan: As usual, the hon. Gentleman is way behind the debate. He should appreciate that, as I said, league tables are here to stay. The debate is not about whether tables should be published but about what information should be published and how. Independent research on league tables carried out by audience selection showed that more than half of parents of five to 16-year-olds thought it important to have

performance information. More than three quarters of parents choosing a secondary school, including some Opposition Front Benchers, support the publication of information in performance tables and find the tables helpful when making their choices. Opposition Front Benchers prove that with their choice of schools for their own children.

School Leaving Age

15. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to alter the school leaving age. [29108]

Mr. Paice: None.

Mr. Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the interests of children in my constituency of Cleethorpes who stay on at school after 16 will be severely harmed if the parental right to child benefit is removed?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend follows other colleagues in pointing out the absurdity of the Labour party's recent proposal. Under this Government, if a young person of 16 decides to stay on at school to do a two-year A-level course, the parents continue to receive child benefit, which means about £1,000 going into the family household budget. Labour proposes to confiscate about £1,000 from every A-level student's family. How does Labour equate that with improving opportunities for young people?

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government are trying to reduce through the back door the school leaving age for tens of thousands of young children to as young as 13. Will the Minister confirm that his Department and the Department of Health have written to every employers' organisation in Britain, asking them to agree to a change in the law that would allow employers to employ children as young as 13 in place of adults for up to 20 hours per week during term time? That is despite the fact that, only four weeks ago, a company in the Prime Minister's constituency was fined £12,500 for employing children under the age of 14 in a factory. Will the Minister give a commitment to withdraw this slave labour proposal and ensure that children as young as 13 remain in school and are not employed by unscrupulous employers for £1 an hour or less?

Mr. Paice: There is no proposal whatsoever that children should be taken out of school as slave labour, or for any of the other ridiculous assumptions that the hon. Gentleman made. The Government propose in a consultation document to float the idea that young children aged from 14 could spend up to one day a week either in the workplace or a further education college. *[Interruption.]* I am surprised that Opposition Members are barracking me, because there is very little difference between our proposal and what appears in Labour's own policy document, "Aiming Higher", which states:

> "Those who are significantly disaffected with the school system should be offered the opportunity to follow part of their studies in FE colleges".

That is precisely along the lines that we are proposing.

Royal Assent

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Non-Domestic Rating (Information) Act 1996

Reserve Forces Act 1996

National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Act 1996

Police Act 1996

Industrial Tribunals Act 1996

Employment Rights Act 1996

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the House to summon to the Bar a British citizen who is also a European Commissioner, so that we can hold Commissioner Kinnock to account for the way in which he is seeking to undermine our efforts to lift the export ban on British beef?

Madam Speaker: There is no way in which the action that the hon. Gentleman suggests can take place.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on an event that took place during Question Time this afternoon. When the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) asked a question, I clearly saw the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) standing next to your Chair to check on what the hon. Gentleman said. When, for once, the hon. Member for Oldham, West seemed to be in tune with new Labour, the hon. Member for Hartlepool slipped out without having the courtesy to listen to the Minister's reply. Is that in order?

Madam Speaker: I can see that it is time that the House went into recess and we all went home.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has any advance been made on the balance of education and employment questions? I know that the matter has been raised on previous occasions, but the imbalance between education and employment—and even within education—is apparent. For example, we had no opportunity today to talk about higher education, a vital part of the future of this country, which has suffered massive cuts in its budget which are affecting universities.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and the House know that Question Time is operated on a ballot system. I noticed today that only two questions were related to employment matters—Questions 1 and 17. I hoped to reach the latter, but we were very slow today in getting through the Order Paper. I hope that hon. Members do better in future, and we may then be able to have a wide variety of questions that suit all hon. Members and all interests in the House.

Civil Service

[*Relevant documents: The Fifth Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1993-94 (House of Commons Paper No. 27-1) on the Role of the Civil Service, the Government's response, incorporated in The Civil Service: Taking forward Continuity and Change (Cm 2748), and Minutes of Evidence taken before the Public Service Committee on 16th January, 7th February and 28th February 1996 (House of Commons Papers Nos. 147, 213 and 265 of Session 1995-96).*]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.33 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Government's policies on the Civil Service, as set out in the White Papers 'Continuity and Change' and 'Taking Forward Continuity and Change', including the promulgation of the Civil Service Code from 1st January 1996, the establishment of the Senior Civil Service from 1st April 1996 and the strengthening of the role of the Civil Service Commissioners in maintaining the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit in recruitment; also welcomes the Government's policy with regard to the privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services, with the proposed safeguards to protect the quality of Civil Service recruitment; and looks forward to the intended publication in July of a White Paper on training and development in the Civil Service, associated with the further development by the Civil Service College of a number of partnerships with the private sector which will enhance its status in the provision of courses for those working in the public and private sector.

The motion has been tabled to enable the House to consider the main elements of the Government's proposals for the civil service and to clarify some of our plans for its future development.

The motion is in three parts. The first concerns the latest developments following the White Papers "Continuity and Change" and "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", that is, the promulgation of the civil service code, the establishment of the senior civil service and the enhanced role of the civil service commissioners. The second part covers our intentions regarding the privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services, and the arrangements that are proposed to protect the quality of civil service recruitment. The agency is more commonly known by its acronym RAS. The third part relates to our forthcoming White Paper on training and development in the civil service, and the further development by the Civil Service College of partnerships with the private sector.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The Chancellor has identified the first two themes as "Continuity and Change" and privatisation. There is intense dismay about proposals relating to Horticulture Research International, a magnificent scientific research establishment in my constituency. Although it has been subjected to endless processes of reform and restructuring, especially during the 1980s, it has been allowed to stabilise since 1990, and has performed every task required of it to the highest standard. For reasons of empty ideology, however—this is really scraping the bottom of the barrel—its privatisation is now being proposed. Will the right hon. Gentleman use his influence to ensure that no such destructive act proceeds?

Mr. Freeman: I give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that I shall look into the proposals in greater detail, and draw his comments to the attention of my right hon. Friends who are responsible for such matters.

Let me begin with the civil service code that came into force on 1 January this year. It sets out in a few paragraphs the constitutional framework of the civil service, and the values that every civil servant is expected to uphold. It forms part of the terms and conditions of employment of every civil servant, and considerable efforts have been made to publicise it, including steps intended to ensure that every civil servant has his or her own copy.

There are several reasons why the House should welcome the code's promulgation. Above all, its introduction has served powerfully to reaffirm the values that underpin the civil service, to which the Government remain committed. They are integrity, political impartiality, selection and promotion on merit and accountability to Parliament through Ministers.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I was pleased to hear the Chancellor enumerate those qualities. Can he tell us why—according to a book by David Butler—when it came to deciding the position relating to the poll tax, the permanent secretary involved was simply told, "This is in our political interest"? If that is the Government's attitude to the civil service, is it not surprising that we do not come up with more bizarre answers than we do now?

Mr. Freeman: It is very important for the civil service not only to act in the best interests of an independent service with full integrity, loyal to its political masters of the day, but to be seen to be able to serve Administrations of different political colours. That is the test: whether civil servants in any particular Department can continue through a change in Administration, and serve the new policies of an incoming Administration of whatever political colour.

The code does not assert any new values—it is not intended to—but the fact of its introduction has sent a clear signal about the importance that the traditional civil service values continue to have. Those values derive much of their day-to-day force from the fact that they command near-universal support. Thus general support for the code is clearly important, because the civil service is not the exclusive property of the Government of the day; it is a permanent and impartial service on which the Government of the day have, so to speak, the lease rather than the freehold. In other words, the civil service must command the confidence not only of the Government, but of potential future Administrations.

The code contains an important innovation. In addition to internal appeals procedures run by Departments, there is now a right of appeal to the independent civil service commissioners. Civil servants can now appeal when they believe that they are being required to act in a way which is illegal, improper or unethical, which breaches constitutional convention or a professional code, which may involve maladministration or which otherwise breaches the code or raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Such an appeal, however, can be routed only through the head of the Department in which the civil servant works. The civil

[Mr. John Garrett]

servant must first make the point to that person. Therefore, there is a chance of retaliation against someone who protests about the illegal or improper activities of a senior civil servant or Minister, which is likely to be recorded on his or her personnel record.

Mr. Freeman: That is a gloomy and negative assessment. It is perfectly right and proper that, in the first place, the civil servant should have the responsibility of reporting his or her concern through the chain of command to the permanent secretary of the Department, but then there is an automatic and unamendable right of appeal to the civil service commissioners. That right can be exercised as quickly as the individual complaining deems appropriate. It is entirely appropriate that the permanent secretary of the Department should be aware of the concerns—concerns that are in some cases, perhaps, justifiably held by the individual—and should know of them first.

It is essential that the arrangements should be credible, and it is clear from our consultation last year that we have a provision that commands widespread confidence. As a succinct and widely available statement of the standards asked of civil servants, the code enables the public to know what they should expect of the civil service.

The creation of the senior civil service is another reform that has commanded widespread support. As the name implies, the senior civil service covers the senior staff—that is, former grades 1 to 5.

The White Papers, "Continuity and Change" and "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", set out the Government's broad objectives for the senior civil service, which came into being on 1 April.

The new senior civil servants have an important role to play in providing leadership, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose and sustaining key civil service values at a time when most responsibilities are devolved to individual Departments and agencies.

Senior civil service staff will be managed by Departments within a broad common framework. That framework has a number of important new features. First, there are more flexible performance-related pay structures than existed before. That gives Departments more scope to pay people according to their individual circumstances, including the difficulty of their jobs, and to reward according to their individual contribution.

Secondly, we have cut out unnecessary jobs and hierarchies and abolished the old inflexible senior grading structure, which restricted Departments unnecessarily in settling the way in which they organised themselves. The resulting streamlining will lead to an overall reduction of well over 20 per cent. in the number of senior posts.

Thirdly, senior civil servants, like other senior managers, are moving on to personal, formal written contracts. Those set out more clearly than before, in writing, the terms and conditions of employment for senior civil servants, ensuring that people understand properly their rights and obligations.

Fourthly, we have developed a new senior appraisal system. It ensures that our senior performance management systems match best practice elsewhere in the public and private sectors.

Fifthly, we have increased the use of open competition for filling senior vacancies, both across Departments and more widely. So, in recent years, around 30 per cent. of vacancies at the top three levels of the civil service have been openly advertised outside the service, including, in the past year, six posts at permanent secretary level.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Two factors concern me. The first is the performance-related pay of senior civil servants, who after all are closely allied to the thinking of the Government of the day. The performance-related pay might be related not just to their ability but to how far they satisfy certain political considerations, which is a serious matter. Secondly, on the fixed-term contracts, if we proceed along those lines, senior civil servants will be under even greater pressure. Those are matters that concern the House and anyone else who is concerned with good administration, and I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman would care to reflect on them.

Mr. Freeman: It is important that performance pay—it is modest in relation to basic salary, and certainly in relation to what is paid in the private sector—is determined on merit and performance, not on political loyalty. Civil servants should have loyalty to their Ministers, but should not portray their political affiliations, nor should performance pay be in any way related to political favours that may or may not be deemed to have been performed. That is an extremely important principle. Performance pay is essentially determined by civil servants themselves—ultimately by the permanent secretary—and not by the Minister. It would not be appropriate if it were seen as a Minister giving rewards for political favours. That would be widely unpopular in the civil service and it would be wrong.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for arriving a little late for his speech. On performance-related pay, how many senior civil servants leave the service early for the private sector? If we are losing a steady number, is that not an argument for more PRP—for making it more flexible and a bigger element of basic pay, so that we can appropriately reward civil servants who make the sacrifice of staying in public life and avoid losing the best talent to the private sector?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend will agree that there has been a remarkable change in the level of civil service pay so that it is much more commensurate with private sector pay. There is no great desire, as there was a decade ago, to leave the service because of pay. Of course, there are civil servants whom we would like to retain who leave for substantially better-paid work, but I would not describe that as a main feature of the movement of civil servants out of the public sector.

We have lost, or will lose, up to 20 per cent. of the senior civil service in most Departments through restructuring and opening up and making more flexible the previously monolithic structure of some Departments. Some civil servants have taken well-earned early retirement, where some may pursue other jobs. Some have gone to the private sector. I do not have detailed figures. The introduction of PRP is appropriate in modern life, whether in the public or private sector, to reward not political loyalty but effort, achievement, leadership and efficiency.

Mr. Jenkin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Freeman: If my hon. Friend will allow it, I should like to make some progress. I have a fair amount to say, but I shall try to compress it in the interests of the debate.

We have committed ourselves to a renewed emphasis on developing talent. We want to equip our senior people and their potential successors so that they contribute effectively to their jobs and develop satisfying and well-planned careers to meet the Government's and the individual's aspirations. We have already announced our plans to publish a White Paper on that during the summer.

The senior civil service is now well suited to play a vital role both in maintaining traditional civil service values and in driving through necessary change. It will continue to provide clear-sighted and impartial policy advice to Government. It will continue to manage the delivery of a wide range of services to the private sector and the general public. However, it will do so in a way that leads to still greater efficiency and in accordance with the principles of the citizens charter, which will continue to raise standards of service to the customer across the whole of public service. We are confident that the senior civil service, like the wider civil service, will continue to be recognised as being among the world's best as we enter the next millennium. I was going to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), but I see that he is talking to a higher authority.

I shall now deal with the enhanced role of the civil service commissioners, brought into effect by the continuity and change White Papers. The commissioners' primary role is to maintain the key principles of fair and open competition and of selection on merit in relation to recruitment to the civil service. The Government have made clear their commitment to those key principles, but we have gone further than lip service: we have strengthened the commissioners' independence and powers in relation to the regulatory framework for civil service recruitment, to ensure that the key principles are upheld in practice.

The main enhancements to the role of the commissioners were summarised in the White Paper "Taking Forward Continuity and Change". The civil service commissioners became responsible for the interpretation of the principle of fair and open competition on merit for all civil service recruitment, not only for the most senior recruitment. They have issued a simple but binding recruitment code for Departments and agencies, to replace the former Minister's rules. They audit Departments' and agencies' recruitment systems against the requirements of the recruitment code. They publish an annual report. Their report for 1995-96, the first to cover their enhanced responsibilities, will be published shortly.

The commissioners continue to approve each appointment from outside the civil service to the new senior civil service and to take a direct part in senior competitions.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the Government consider further extending the role of the civil service commissioners beyond examining recruitment across the range of civil service employees?

Mr. Freeman: That is a novel idea, on which I should like to reflect. I suspect that my hon. Friend is suggesting an extension of the commissioners' role in relation to those who are not technically civil servants but who serve in the public sector. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be able to develop that argument during the debate. It is an interesting idea, but the commissioners' role is, as their name implies, currently restricted to the civil service.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): I hope that the Minister responds sympathetically to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), because there is a wide area of the public service to which the experience of the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners could be extended if it had wider public service responsibilities—quangos, and the inspectorate of education, whose staff are Crown servants but not civil servants, to name only two examples.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that one of our main daily newspapers describes contributions to debates by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and myself as sleep-inducing and boring. [HON. MEMBERS: "Never."] The right hon. Gentleman and I are perhaps in a minority of two in believing that not to be the case.

The suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) is a constructive idea, which I would not want to dismiss. We should return to that. I look forward to the right hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate. Certainly, in relation to quangos and non-departmental public bodies—that is, bodies without a Minister in charge—there is a very strong case for looking afresh at some of the principles that we apply, especially on recruitment and promotion, so I take the idea seriously.

In addition, the First Commissioner now has a role in relation to senior internal appointments, and attends the senior appointments selection committee. He is able to comment on the choice between open competition and internal appointment in relation to selection on merit, and on the development of senior selection processes.

The new regime introduced in 1995 clarified the roles of Departments and agencies and of Recruitment and Assessment Services. It has now been made clear that it is for the head of each Department or agency to ensure that the key recruitment principles are followed in practice. Departments and agencies are required to publish information about their recruitment systems.

RAS has had no formal role in regulating civil service recruitment, although of course it adheres to the commissioners' requirements in the services that it provides. RAS now focuses entirely on its role as a provider of high-quality recruitment and related services. That is in line with the principle recommended by the 1994 review, that the roles of service provider, that is, RAS, and the regulator, that is, the Departments and the civil service commissioners, should be separate.

Mr. Garrett: What is the justification for the retention of the administrative fast-stream entry in an organisation that is now supposed to be increasingly technocratic and managerial?

Mr. Freeman: The fast stream is designed primarily to recruit graduates into the civil service. It does not guarantee—

Mr. Garrett: They are not all graduates.

Mr. Freeman: No. I said "primarily". They are primarily graduates. It is a very competitive market. There is not a fast track to promotion, to permanent secretary level. At the early stages of the introduction of individuals—indeed, I suspect that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, would be able to answer in a far more personal capacity because he was probably a product of that system—

Mr. Garrett: Without justification.

Mr. Freeman: I was not seeking to dodge the question. I am merely pointing out that we have some personal experience on the Treasury Bench. I believe that there is justification for the fast stream, simply because it attracts, from memory, about 7,000 to 8,000 applications a year for perhaps 200 jobs, in a very competitive graduate pool. It does so because it provides a tailor-made system of recruitment and pays special attention to those highly qualified individuals.

Mr. Garrett *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: Of course they are. They are for the most part graduates, who, if they did not join the civil service, would be competed for in the private sector.

I now refer to the privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services. RAS was established as a next steps agency to provide services to Departments and agencies on a repayment basis. It is widely regarded for its recruitment and assessment capabilities, and is perhaps best known for its role in the recruitment of high-calibre graduates to the civil service fast stream, the future "high fliers" in the civil service, but without any guarantee of promotion.

The agency has done well. With no tied business, it has to compete in a dynamic marketplace against Departments' in-house teams as well as against private sector recruitment companies. With the continuing development of a range of services designed to meet the changing needs of customers, it has established a reputation as a centre of excellence and it has been able to increase its overall market share of civil service recruitment, from 7 per cent. at the start to 12 per cent. in 1995-96—RAS accounts for only 12 per cent. of recruitment into the civil service.

The opportunity for RAS to compete in wider public and private sector markets will come at a time when companies are beginning to place their graduate recruitment in the hands of outside specialist recruitment firms. RAS will be especially well placed to exploit that trend. Freedom to develop fully the potential of the business will enhance the range of services and the value for money that it can offer to customers, including existing customers and Departments. Therefore, we are confident that privatisation will also give best value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister is well aware that that proposal was heavily defeated in the House of Lords—I think by 120 votes to 64. In response to the defeat, the Lord Privy Seal said that the Government would bring forward proposals taking that into account. What changes have been made since the debate in the House of Lords?

Mr. Freeman: I had planned to deal with that issue later in my speech, but I shall deal with it now. I have been called to appear before the relevant Committee of another place, which is looking at the public sector and its services, including Recruitment and Assessment Services. I look forward to doing that after the Whitsun recess. The hon. Gentleman must concede that neither this House nor the other place has had as comprehensive an opportunity as today to consider the reasons for our suggestion of transferring ownership of RAS to the private sector. We are now doing that. When I attend the Committee of another place, I shall expand on that in even greater detail.

I look forward to seeing the conclusions of the report of that Committee, which I understand will be available before the summer recess—and before we complete any arrangements for the transfer of ownership of RAS. I give my assurance to this place and to the other place that the observations of the Committee will be taken into account and carefully considered. If the hon. Gentleman listened to the Lords debate, or read the report of it, he will have come to the conclusion that the arguments in it did not bear a tremendous relationship to the realities of the new situation, post-1995, when the principles governing recruitment into the civil service and the regulation of that process have been removed from RAS.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Is the Minister saying that the noble Lord who led for the Government—who made two lengthy speeches—was incompetent and did not put forward the proper arguments? As I understand it, he put forward the arguments and a distinguished collection of Lords—if I may so boldly call them that—comprehensively undermined them and, as a result, the Government were defeated by a vast majority. If the Committee comes forward with proposals, the Government ought to take them very seriously and delay their project.

Mr. Freeman: I am the Minister responsible, and this is the first opportunity that I have had to account to the House—this is ministerial accountability. I am explaining the policy and the reasons for it in detail. I look forward to giving evidence to the Committee and to its deliberations. Any conclusions of the Committee that are relevant to the privatisation of RAS will be carefully considered. I give the House and the Committee an assurance that I shall treat the deliberations seriously. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that a Committee of this place or another place should control the policies of Government. It is this House and the other place that must pass specific conclusions on specific legislative proposals.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Would it not be sensible to defer any progress on the privatisation until the Select Committee has given the Chancellor the benefit of its full deliberations?

Mr. Freeman: It depends what the right hon. Gentleman means by "progress". I assume that the relevant Select Committee will report before the summer

recess and that I shall have the opportunity to study its recommendations and perhaps even discuss the matter again. Therefore, we shall not conclude the process until that has occurred. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman places particular stress on the word "conclude". He will know that it takes many months of careful planning—I shall comment on the timetable in a moment—to conclude a complicated privatisation. That process should, and will, continue and it will not be concluded until the Select Committee has reported—so long as that occurs before the summer recess.

Mr. Gunnell: Will we debate the matter again in the House before the process is concluded? The privatisation announcement was made in an answer to a written question, and this is the first opportunity that hon. Members have had to discuss it. It is a highly controversial matter, and it is not good to debate it immediately before a recess, when few hon. Members are able to participate in the debate. I believe that we should debate the matter in full in the House.

Mr. Freeman: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns: he has expressed them very clearly. The matter does not require legislation, as Opposition Front Benchers know and understand. We are debating the matter properly today. If the Opposition call another proper debate on the subject—as occurred with Her Majesty's Stationery Office—I shall be happy to respond. We have debated the issue three times and we shall debate it properly now. I am trying to explain the reasons for our decision. I believe that we should clear away some of the less rational comments regarding the process, look at the issues in an unemotional manner—perhaps in a boring fashion—and come to a considered conclusion.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I apologise again to my right hon. Friend for my absence earlier. We look forward to seeing the Opposition Front Bench, as represented by the archetype of new Labour, participate constructively in the debate. I am sure that Opposition Front Benchers will not opt for the reflex anti-privatisation reaction that we expect from Labour Back Benchers.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I look forward to his contribution during the debate, which I am sure, as always, will be based on a wealth of experience.

RAS has already had some success in its exploration of wider public sector markets. The Government believe that freedom from public sector operating constraints will allow it to exploit and develop fully its considerable expertise with new customers, including private sector customers. That is why we announced last November that RAS should be privatised. Since that announcement, we have advertised the potential sale of the business and received completed questionnaires from interested bidders. Those expressions of interest have undergone an initial sift and I intend to send a detailed information memorandum describing the business to bidders who have pre-qualified, inviting them to submit indicative bids for the business.

The information memorandum will be issued shortly. I intend to place a copy of the letter inviting bids and the information memorandum—omitting commercially sensitive and personal information—in the Libraries of each House. I shall write to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland about the matter as soon as I can. If the memorandum is issued during the recess, I shall send him a letter detailing the steps that I have taken.

The important civil service reforms that have been carried through in recent years have given rise to concerns in another place that key public service values may be under threat. Those concerns were voiced in the debate on the civil service last year, which considered the report on the role of the civil service by the former Treasury and Civil Service Committee as well as the Government's Command Paper "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", which accepted most of the Committee's conclusions. On that occasion, we made clear our continuing commitment to the principles laid down in the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the 19th century, which underpin the integrity and the quality of our civil service. I have already restated that commitment today.

Nevertheless, the opinion recently expressed in the other place on our proposals for the future of RAS was clearly based on that same concern. It was suggested that privatisation would remove a key safeguard of public service standards and risk a decline in the quality of recruitment procedures, and so of recruits themselves. I shall be appearing before their Lordships' Public Service Select Committee shortly after the recess, and I look forward to receiving the Committee's report—which I understand is expected before the summer recess—on its findings regarding the privatisation of RAS. When that Committee reports, I shall consider its recommendations with care and respond in due course. Meanwhile, we are adhering to the privatisation timetable, which is aimed at a successful completion later in the summer.

I want to explain why the concerns are misplaced, not least because of the safeguards that we are introducing to guarantee the integrity and quality of civil service recruitment undertaken by RAS after privatisation.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does the Minister agree that there is already a great problem, in that 1,706 maladministration complaints have been filed with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in the past year? Is there not an increasing correlation between departmental maladministration and the loss of 32,000 civil servants since 1993? How can quality be achieved when staff are put under amazing pressure through job cuts?

Mr. Freeman: I do not accept that there is any correlation between examples of maladministration and civil service staff numbers. I accept that there is great pressure on the civil service, as there is on just about every private sector company. We live in a much more competitive world, and the House and the taxpayer demand proper value for money and control of public expenditure.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is not that nonsense? The specific terms laid down for the creation of the Child Support Agency specified that civil servants should not normally be recruited, but outside people with no experience should be recruited—many of whom are on shift work of no more than four and a half hours and are badly paid. If the Minister seriously believes that that produces quality work, I suggest that he reads carefully not only criticisms

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

of the CSA but the continuing complaints that every Member of Parliament has about the agency's ability to deal with the problems that confront it every day.

Mr. Freeman: I submit that those problems are to do with procedures, not the number of civil servants employed.

Mr. Derek Foster: I am totally surprised that the Minister dismisses the parliamentary ombudsman's criticism, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) referred. When I tackled the Parliamentary Secretary in a debate only a short time ago, he dismissed the argument in the same way. He felt that nothing in the report underpinned what had been said in the press release. I took the opportunity to write to the ombudsman, and he reaffirmed his comments in the press release and said that he had all the evidence required to underpin his criticism.

Mr. Freeman: No one disagrees that the duties of a particular Department must be discharged with the appropriate number of civil servants, but I do not accept the contention that the reduction in their total number correlates to the number of complaints of maladministration, for which there are many reasons.

Mr. Connarty: As a member of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Select Committee, I can tell the Minister that many permanent secretaries have appeared before it—and when we ask about maladministration, it comes down to pressure on staff. When staff make a mistake, they do not have time to find out how it was made, who made it and how it can be corrected. Pressure is created by lack of numbers, and even changes to the system have not relieved that pressure. Will the Minister accept that point, before he rushes headlong down the road of further cuts and maladministration?

Mr. Freeman: One of the factors relating to the responsibilities of a specific Department and the way in which it discharges its duties is staff numbers. Many other factors, however, are involved: the procedures, the training and whether the right balance between public sector and contracted-out functions has been struck, to name but three. The general contention that there is a correlation of some kind between the number of cases of maladministration—1,706 was the figure cited—and the decline in the number of civil servants is not sustainable.

The concerns expressed in another place tend to imply that our proposals—to privatise RAS—will change the rules governing civil service recruitment and the responsibilities for ensuring that they are followed. They will not. The rules, based on the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit, are rightly regarded as cornerstones of civil service integrity. Those rules are embodied in the civil service Order in Council and set out in the recruitment code of the independent civil service commissioners. Departments and agencies are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the code are met.

The commissioners audit their recruitment policies against those requirements. RAS has only an operational role as a provider of recruitment, assessment and consultancy services to civil service customers who choose to use it. It retains no links with the regulatory functions of the commissioners. Those arrangements are in no way affected by the privatisation of RAS.

It has also been suggested that our proposals may affect the quality of recruitment, in particular recruitment to the civil service fast stream. In their response to the review of the fast stream, published in July 1994, the Government announced their intention to retain a servicewide fast stream scheme aimed at recruiting the very best graduates. The privatisation of RAS will not change that. We propose to convey to the new private sector owner of RAS the exclusive contracts to provide fast stream customers with the recruitment services that they require.

It might be helpful to the House if I describe the safeguards designed to guarantee the integrity and quality of the fast stream selection process after the sale.

Most importantly, there will continue to be close civil service involvement at all stages. We have stipulated that actual selection of candidates must remain in the hands of civil servants. The civil service will continue to provide assessors at the civil service selection boards—the main assessment stage of the process—and panel members for final selection boards. They, not RAS, will decide the success or failure of candidates.

The main fast stream contract is being drawn up in consultation with the customer consortium of fast stream employing Departments and is designed to ensure that they retain at least the same control over the process and tests used in their competitions after the sale as they currently enjoy. The Office of Public Service will work with customer departments and RAS to ensure that obligations are met and that the day-to-day operation of the contract runs smoothly. Those running specialist fast stream schemes are also involved in the work to create separate contracts that will meet their particular requirements. Customers—Government Departments—will also be closely consulted in the selection of the new owner.

The detail of all stages of the selection processes will be set out in the contract schedules. In his recent independent audit of the fast stream, Professor Bartram commended RAS's approach of treating those processes as dynamic rather than fixed, and it will be important for the processes to continue to change and evolve in response to customer needs. However, all changes will need approval from those customers. It will not be possible for the new owner to seek to take short cuts, therefore, in an effort to reduce costs. Nor would the new owner want to do so. We shall select a new owner with a clear commitment to making a success of those prestigious contracts and to maintaining the reputation that RAS has established for its leading-edge public sector recruitment and assessment work. The new owner can be expected to put greater effort into maintaining positive and productive relationships with civil service customers.

The Government will retain ownership of the tests and exercises used in the fast stream selection process, including those developed by the new owner for fast stream use. The tests for use in each competition will continue to be approved by customers. Civil servants will still be responsible for preparing background exercises based on civil service work. Under the terms of the intellectual property licence to be granted to the new owner, the tests will be strictly protected while current. Use of old tests elsewhere will be subject to provisions

designed to ensure that the integrity and efficacy of the fast stream schemes is in no way compromised. Again, customers are closely involved in the work on the licence, as well as the contractual terms relating to that area.

The staff of RAS have shown great commitment in maintaining the highest standards of service, while also working to prepare for privatisation. We of course attach the utmost importance to ensuring that they are treated fairly and that their rights are fully respected in the process. Arrangements have been made to keep staff as closely involved and informed as possible. We intend to publish the short-list of bidders in due course, so that staff representatives can have the opportunity to meet prospective purchasers and discuss their plans with them. As has been the case with other transfers to the private sector, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply at the point of sale to preserve all terms and conditions.

I can also state that we would not wish to take forward proposals from bidders which include the utilisation of offices outside Basingstoke or its immediate vicinity for the head office operations of RAS. That will provide reassurances to staff.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the sale is conducted on a basis that not only maintains and enhances the standing of RAS as a high-quality provider of recruitment and assessment services, but guarantees that the integrity of the recruitment that RAS carries out for civil service customers is maintained. The provisions that I have outlined will meet those objectives.

I shall conclude by dealing with the Civil Service College, which has aroused a good deal of attention and misplaced concern in recent weeks and months.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I do not know whether the Minister has seen the four questions on today's Order Paper, relating to the prior options review and the future of the public sector research establishments. As he is responsible for the civil service, and as thousands of civil servants will be affected by those announcements, which have not yet been made available to the House, does he share my concern that the morale of those civil servants will go into major decline and that the announcements will be seen as an attack on the science base in the United Kingdom? Why are those announcements being made by way of written answers and not by way of debate in the Chamber?

Mr. Freeman: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the prior options process has now been in operation for a good number of years. It is a routine method of examining whether a certain function should remain in the public sector and, having decided that it should remain in the public sector, whether any particular aspect of that service needs to be market-tested. I shall certainly look into the specific points that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and I am grateful to him for reminding me of them. I was not personally aware of them or briefed—

Mr. Ingram: Why?

Mr. Freeman: As the motion in the name of the Prime Minister makes clear, I am dealing with certain specific issues. If the hon. Gentleman would like an answer, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will seek to address that point when he replies to the debate.

I conclude by dealing with the Civil Service College. For more than 25 years, the Civil Service College has provided training and development for civil servants, particularly those at senior levels. As well as training more than 30,000 students a year on more than 500 different courses, the college makes an important contribution to the articulation and preservation of the values enshrined in the civil service code. In addition, the college is highly regarded around the world and receives a steady stream of eminent foreign visitors.

The college is an executive agency within the Office of Public Service, and as such, its strategy and operation have recently been reviewed. The review of the Civil Service College has been designed to ensure that the college achieves its full potential for developing the best traditions and the international reputation of the civil service. A wide range of options has been considered, including continuing as now in the public sector and partial or full transfer of ownership to the private sector. The Government concluded that the college should proceed within the public sector to develop new activities in partnership with the private sector.

The Government will ensure that the essential link between the civil service and the Civil Service College is preserved. The college will build on and extend already established and successful partnerships, which include the delivery of a public sector MBA in partnership with Cranfield university and Manchester business school, the delivery of courses on the private finance initiative with Price Waterhouse and a project in the Czech Republic together with a Dutch private sector partner.

New partnerships currently under negotiation cover a variety of training courses, seminars, conferences and consultancy assignments. With them, the Civil Service College will have the means and resources to extend and enhance the quality of the services that it provides. What the Government are seeking to achieve with those further developments is the continued development of training for civil servants, particularly those with professional and senior management responsibilities, and that the college should become a centre of excellence in public sector management and reform, recognised in Britain and worldwide.

Later this summer—before the recess—I hope to publish a White Paper on training and development in the civil service, dealing not only generally with enhancements and improvement to those processes, but specifically with Investors in People, and commitments that the public sector should be making to support that initiative.

In conclusion, the motion covers the Government's intentions for the future of the civil service. It represents a package of important measures: the promulgation of the civil service code, the strengthening of the role of the civil service commissioners, the development of the senior civil service, the privatisation of RAS, with the necessary safeguards to protect the quality and principles of civil service recruitment, and the forthcoming White Paper on training and development in the civil service, associated with the further development by the Civil Service College of a number of partnerships with the private sector. I commend those proposals to the House.

4.19 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

[Mr. Derek Foster]

'welcomes the statement in the White Paper "Continuity and Change" that "the Government recognises that the Civil Service is not the property of any single administration", and commends the Government for constructing consensus around the Civil Service code; regrets the Government's refusal to manage other Civil Service reform by seeking consensus or properly consulting staff; recognises the widespread feeling of job insecurity and "initiative fatigue" throughout the Civil Service; urges the Government not to proceed so late in the Parliament with the privatisation of HMSO, RAS and OHSA and to join opposition parties in seeking consensus by requesting the Public Service Committee to conduct a thorough independent review of all recent Civil Service reforms.'.

As I listened to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, I realised why he has his job. I am sure that he could present the slaughter of the innocents as the most acceptable and humane of happenings.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Did you not use that line last time?

Mr. Foster: No, I did not. The hon. Gentleman is a veteran of such debates, and should remember what goes on.

We are witnessing a sea change in British politics. The Conservative party once had the reputation of being the most formidable vote-winning machine throughout Europe. Now, it is so riven by ideological division that it cannot address the concerns of the British electorate, and certainly cannot address the concerns of the civil service.

Even with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary at the heart of the Government, each one a pro-European, one-nation Tory—the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster confesses to be of the same persuasion—the Conservative party cannot drive to the middle ground of British politics, which is now commanded by the Leader of the Opposition and new Labour. Stung by the charges of inadequate leadership, incompetence and rift, wherever the Tory high command tries to create an impression of momentum, the inner dynamic of the party drives to the right.

Since the Deputy Prime Minister took charge less than 12 months ago, he has driven to the right on civil service issues with frenetic glee. Frustrated in his plan to sell off the Post Office, he is privatising every tiddler that moves or is stationary in the civil service. The civil service has been so privatised, market-tested and contracted out that job insecurity is widespread.

Although the President of the Board of Trade thinks that job insecurity is only a state of mind, it strikes me that Ministers and Tory Back Benchers take their own job insecurity seriously enough. Even if we grant that the President of the Board of Trade might conceivably be correct and that job insecurity is a state of mind, I remind Conservative Members that being a Tory voter is also a state of mind.

The Deputy Prime Minister dispatches his messenger the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the House to persuade us to approve the motion; yet the only reason why we are having this debate is that the Government suffered a humiliating defeat in another place. The privatisation of the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency needs, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said, no primary or secondary legislation. The proposal was smuggled out in a written answer one Friday afternoon. There would have been no debate in either House without Lord Bancroft, who initiated a debate in the other place on Friday 8 March.

Of the 20 people who spoke in that debate, only one supported the Government. Those taking part included a former Prime Minister, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary, a former Conservative Minister of Transport, a former Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, and a former Secretary of State for Education. Others included many who have reached the most senior positions in the civil and diplomatic service or in academic life. The result was that the Government lost the vote by 124 votes to 64. When I heard that news, I immediately wrote to the Chancellor asking him to initiate a debate in the Commons. Two months later, he has responded with this debate just before the recess.

In the debate in another place, Lord Bancroft referred to

"the flippant destruction of an essential pillar."

He was referring to the civil service. Lord Callaghan reminded the House that the civil service was

"not the private property of temporary, fleeting Ministers to trifle with as they please. It is the property of us all to guarantee its neutrality, independence and integrity".

He went on to suggest that Ministers

"have been so long in power that they are insensitive to the limits of their responsibilities."

He called for a royal commission or a Select Committee to review the matter, as has happened on many occasions since the great Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the mid-1850s.

Lord Jenkins doubted that it was constitutionally proper for a Government who were clinging on to power

"to force through a totally unnecessary change on a subject which goes to the heart of the delicate balance between party government and wider national interest".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 March 1996; Vol. 570, c. 545-48.]

Lord Hunt of Tanworth said that the process would deserve the most careful consideration at the best of times, but that these were post-Scott times, when the whole question of the public service ethos was under serious discussion.

I do not intend to address all the arguments for and against the privatisation of RAS. I leave that to my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), whom I might describe as my comrade in arms, who will wind up the debate. I just caution the Government that, with such distinguished opponents, whose long and deep experience should not be ignored, they should consider that they may conceivably be wrong.

Should not the Government take the advice of the former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, that they should give the whole matter of civil service reform a proper airing in front of the appropriate Select Committee in this House, or perhaps even a Joint Select Committee of both Houses, so that we can proceed on these matters, which are so crucial to our unwritten British constitution, with some consensus?

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On that point, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm categorically that it is Labour party policy not to politicise the civil service any further, either by appointing a political press secretary to No. 10 Downing street, should, by any

prospect, Labour occupy these Benches, or by adding more political appointees to the private offices of individual Ministers?

Mr. Foster: If I wanted to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, I might say that it would be impossible to politicise the civil service any further, but I shall not be so unkind.

I now turn to the White Paper "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change". In that White Paper, the Government seemed, like Lord Callaghan, to be seeking consensus. They said that they recognised

"that the civil service is not the property of a single Administration."

However, in my view, there is little evidence of a bipartisan approach over the past 17 years, as the Government have imposed wave upon wave of change on the civil service, with no consideration for the views of staff or of the civil service trade unions.

If the Government genuinely want consensus, let them now halt the privatisation of HMSO, RAS, the Occupational Health and Safety Agency and the Government computer centre at Chessington. Let them abandon the market testing of the administration of the principal civil service pension scheme. Let them abandon the privatisation of the public sector research establishments, a matter that was recently raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), because that would damage the continuity, independence and integrity of the science base as a provider of research information and advice in the public interest.

Labour believes that the Government have behaved with reckless irresponsibility in bequeathing two huge problems to their successor. First, the trust between the people and Government is badly fractured. For the first time since the great reforms of the mid-19th century, the probity of the British public service is in question.

I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, intervened earlier. In its eighth report, that Committee spoke of

"a departure from the standards of public conduct which have been established during the past 140 years."

I have an example of that. The Committee discovered, in the very citadel of Government—in the Treasury—that one arm of the Treasury had been defrauded of £250,000 by another of its arms, called Forward Catering. If that type of incompetence and fraud is occurring in the very citadel of Government, what hope have we of discovering it in the "sticks" of Government?

The Public Accounts Committee also claimed that the fragmentation of the civil service makes its job of effective scrutiny far more difficult.

The former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, said that he was

"more worried about the Civil Service than I have ever been in the 60-odd years since I first joined."

If Conservative Members do not like the words of a former Labour Prime Minister, let me remind them of the words spoken in the House by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in the debate on civil service pensions:

"In pursuing the privatisation path, particularly regarding civil service arrangements, my hon. Friend the Minister is making a grave mistake."—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 132.]

Those are the words of a Conservative former Prime Minister.

The fact that the current Prime Minister was forced to set up the Nolan committee is eloquent enough comment that the public have lost confidence in Government and in Parliament to put their houses in order. Those who have read the 1,800 pages of the Scott report—which took three years to complete, at a cost of £3 million—will have had a disturbing picture of Whitehall's culture of secrecy and of the unhealthy relationship between Ministers and civil servants. Restoring trust between the people and Government is a formidable task, which will not be achieved quickly or easily.

New Labour has a very ambitious programme of constitutional and democratic renewal. It is based on four principles: first, a clearer definition and stronger protection of the public interest; secondly, greater decentralisation of Government; thirdly, greater transparency; and, fourthly, much more accountability. Our programme will, of course, include devolution to Scotland, Wales and the English regions, in time; a limited reform of the House of Lords; and a freedom of information Act to make central Government and their agencies and quangos more open.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman inform me about a personal matter? Has he ever been approached by any of his constituents asking for an additional, regional layer of government?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman totally misconceives the Labour party's proposals. We do not propose to impose an additional layer of administration at all.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): If the Labour party does not propose imposing an additional layer of government in forming regional government, which current layer of government would it do away with?

Mr. Foster: I am completely surprised that Conservative Members do not see the virtue—in what is now the most centralised Government in Europe—of pushing power further down to the people. That objective strikes me as eminently sensible and very popular. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not persuaded of its sense.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Foster: No; I shall not give way again for the time being.

I was beginning to describe my party's proposals for dealing with the breakdown of trust between the people and the Government. It is horrifying that the Conservatives are quite unaware that that breakdown is what they have achieved in their 17 years of undistinguished rule. We want to put on a statutory basis the civil service code to which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster referred; we want an effective register of all quango members and their financial, political and other interests; and we want new arrangements to ensure better accountability of quangos at each level on which they operate.

I deal now with the second problem that will face the new Government—the widespread demoralisation throughout the civil and public services. In an interview

[Mr. Foster]

with *The Observer* last November, Sir Robin Butler himself described the revolution sweeping Whitehall Departments as having sapped the morale of civil servants and created a climate of insecurity.

The recently published First Division Association MORI survey revealed that 40 per cent. of senior FDA members expected to leave the service shortly, and that morale was at a low ebb. The much more recent survey of civil servants conducted by *The Observer*, together with the Public Service, Tax and Commerce Union—known as the PTC—and the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists found that 92 per cent. of those asked believed that civil service morale was quite or very bad, and that 73 per cent. would not advise the next generation to join the civil service.

The House will have seen the ICM poll published in *The Observer* on Sunday 5 May, which showed that insecurity has risen sharply in the 1990s and has spread to people of all ages, all regions and all social groups. A sense of insecurity pervades the whole of the civil service. Whenever and wherever I meet civil servants, that is uppermost in their minds.

What will Labour do to tackle low morale in the civil service? First, Labour will affirm its commitment to the public service and reassert the classic civil service values. Those values were once shared by one-nation Conservatives, who have now been elbowed aside by the right-wing ideologues who call the shots.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: Not for the time being.

Secondly, we shall make it clear that the British civil service is a great national asset which, since the 1870s, has been a permanent and impartial instrument of all Administrations. The new Government will recognise their duty to preserve its efficiency and honesty for their successor.

Thirdly, we shall halt privatisation of the service. Fourthly, we shall place a moratorium on market testing while we institute a thorough independent review, but the drive for efficiency—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting that a party which has instituted so many reviews finds the notion of this review mildly amusing.

Mr. Radice: Is not the Government's problem the fact that they have done a great deal without any testing, and without thinking through the implications of what they were doing? Is that not the reason why so many of their policies have failed?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful for that intervention from my distinguished and hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the Chairman of the Public Service Select Committee.

The drive for efficiency, value for money and high-quality service will continue under Labour. However, the motivation will not be the dogmatic wish to drive down public expenditure in order to fund tax handouts. Nor will we seek efficiency gains by driving down public servants' wages and conditions of service; nor will we regard downsizing as an end in itself.

No one should expect the pace of change to slacken, because change is driven by international competitive forces. Change is inevitable, but it does not have to be threatening. Change does not have to mean more job insecurity. Britain will succeed only by embracing change, and managing it for the benefit of all. The Government will be judged by the success with which they prepare the country, including civil servants, to embrace change.

New Labour will invite the British people to become partners with the Government in managing change, because Labour believes that the British people are the nation's most valuable resource. The country can succeed in an increasingly competitive world only by developing the skills and talents of all our people. In the stakeholder society, every citizen must have an opportunity to make his or her contribution. That contribution must be given proper recognition and rewarded fairly. In this way, we will build one nation and unite the country.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I speak as a one-nation Conservative. The right hon. Gentleman talks at length about job insecurity in the civil service, but he has given no analysis of why that insecurity has arisen. Is it not due to the changing nature of the labour market, the introduction of technology, and all the factors that create job insecurity in the private sector? Furthermore, he has given a long list of things that Labour would stop doing. Can he tell us what Labour will do, other than have another review?

Mr. Foster: The Tories cannot wriggle out of the charge that they have created job insecurity by blaming the changing nature of the job market. They have created wave upon wave of changes in the civil service, and they have caused virtually everyone in the service to fear for their jobs and their future. That is the Government's responsibility, and they will suffer for it at the next election.

I believe that a sense of ownership among staff could transform the amount and quality of service throughout the civil service and across the public sector, but that will not occur with demoralised, undervalued and insecure public servants. It will not occur without skilled managers who believe in the quality of the work force and are determined to encourage the development of skills. It will not occur without a great investment in training, and, above all, it will not occur without politicians who believe in the public service and are committed to its success.

My party recognises the wealth of skill, expertise and experience within the civil and public services, and our success in office will largely depend on our ability to galvanise the Whitehall machine. Labour is keen to learn from the best of private sector management, and we see the need to reconcile the clash of cultures that has occurred in recent years. A new genre of public sector managers is required, who are eager to adapt the best of private sector practice and keen to enhance all that is best in the public sector.

Labour and the country are deeply indebted to the former Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and to the Nolan committee for the proposals that have been accepted by the Government. These are remarkable examples of independent committees building consensus where the Government were unable to rise to the task.

The consensus on the new civil service code would not have been possible without the seminal draft proposed by the Select Committee.

Although the code does not go far enough, it is an important step. It provides a unifying set of values to a dangerously fragmented service, and an independent appeal system. It requires Ministers to take cognisance of the code and to refrain from inducing civil servants to act outside the code. Labour will put the code on a statutory basis. Nolan has also made important recommendations.

Mr. Connarty: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—which has a Conservative majority—recommended in its recent report on open government that we should have a freedom of information Act to ensure that the partnership between the public and the civil service is clear, by allowing information to be available to all by statute?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I had intended to refer to that development later in my speech. There now seems to be a consensus emerging that we need a freedom of information Act, but that consensus excludes parts of the Conservative party.

Nolan has made some important recommendations—on Ministers and special advisers taking up business appointments; on amendments to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers"; on quangos, with respect to methods of public appointment; on the rules and procedures assuring probity and proper conduct of business; and, only last week, on local accountability. Those are important advances, which will make the task of the next Labour Government easier, but a wiser Government would have been leading rather than following.

There is, I think, a consensus on next steps agencies. By the end of 1996, 80 per cent. of civil servants may be in such agencies, most of which are working well. Where that is the case, Labour will see no reason to change the structure. Indeed, I have already endorsed the conclusion of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which has stated:

"We believe that the next steps agencies represent a significant improvement in the organisation of government. And that any future government will want to maintain them".

Let me make one thing clear, however. Under Labour, agency status will not be a step towards privatisation. In the case of bodies such as Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency, which may need to borrow in the private sector and sell in wider markets, full commercial freedom in the public sector will be given careful consideration. The Parliamentary Secretary wags his head, but it has been given no consideration whatever by the Government, and that is to their shame.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: There will be a review.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman may not be around to see whatever reviews take place in the future.

There is an important issue relating to ministerial responsibilities. According to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers",

"Ministers are accountable to parliament for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies",

but Sir Robin Butler has drawn a distinction between Ministers' accountability and their responsibility for policies and actions.

That doctrine is very convenient for Ministers. Under such a dictum, it seems possible that no Minister ever need resign over anything. I am aware that perhaps that just ratifies current practice, but, as the reaction to the Scott report demonstrates, it has not satisfied the electorate, and has further damaged the credibility of the democratic process. Furthermore, it may put chief executives, not Ministers, in the firing line, as the Derek Lewis affair showed. Ministers are all too ready to claim credit for success and delegate blame for failure.

Mr. Freeman: Let us be clear about the policy for agencies. The right hon. Gentleman just said that "careful consideration" would be given to allowing agencies such as HMSO—if it remained in the public sector—to compete with the private sector, in the private sector. I think that that was the essence of what he said. Will he confirm that, as a result of this careful consideration, there might well be circumstances in which agencies that were already in the public sector could compete fully in the private sector, with the private sector?

Mr. Foster: I see no problem with that, provided that such careful consideration takes place. I understand that it happens elsewhere in Europe.

Let me return to the question of ministerial responsibility. It was Scott's view that, if Ministers were not to be responsible—in the sense of blameworthy—for all the actions and activities of their Departments and agencies, the corollary was that Parliament must be given fuller information, so that Parliament and people could judge where responsibility lay. I agreed with that; that is why a freedom of information Act is so crucial, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) pointed out.

In addition, however, Parliament should strengthen its Select Committees by extra staffing, and challenging the Osmotherley rules under which civil servants give evidence. Clearly, the Government need to improve the flow of interdepartmental information and decision-making. I look forward to the deliberations of the Select Committee on Public Service on all those issues.

In a recent article in *The Times* on the general theme of the public service, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition wrote:

"We seek to build sensibly on what is in place. We keep what is good and working. We change what isn't."

That strikes me as a balanced approach. Surely a period of calm reflection is required—an open, independent and thorough review of all the changes imposed in recent years and a proper assessment of effectiveness, efficiency and value for money because we do not believe what the Government tell us about those concepts. It should be a review that builds on the excellent work of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Nolan committee.

Mr. Duncan: Another review.

Mr. Foster: No, it is the same review. The challenge is to create a distinctive public service management philosophy, which adopts the best management techniques from the private sector, while enhancing the long-standing public service values of which we are so proud and which are so essential to good government, whoever is in power.

The Government are guilty of too little continuity and too much change—much of it ill-conceived, ill-considered and poorly managed. The Government have been driven by dogma to the point of recklessness in the exercise of their duty of care to the independence, impartiality and integrity of the British civil service. With 500,000 civil servants—many living in marginal seats such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich—a reasonable person would expect the Government to heed Voltaire's advice as the election approaches. [HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) has a 6,500 majority."] I am referring to the other seat in Norwich—that of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett)—and I think that the Minister is thinking of that seat, too.

Hon. Members will recall that Voltaire—a noted atheist—was on his deathbed urged by a priest to repent and renounce the devil. Voltaire replied:

"This is no time to make enemies".

Perhaps the Government too are beyond redemption. It would be a kindness for them to be put out of their misery sooner rather than later, and the House can do it by voting for the Opposition amendment.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) mentioned a number of written answers about the privatisation of some parts of the civil service, which were due to be published at 3.30 pm. I have been seeking the same written answers for much of the day. The hon. Gentleman has gone out of the Chamber again to establish whether they are in the Library. It seems unreasonable that we should be debating significant matters of privatisation when that material, which the Government announced today, is not before us and was not explained by the Minister in his remarks. I hope that you do not mind my drawing Ministers' attention to that matter in a point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman does not expect me to answer that question, but Ministers are present and undoubtedly heard his point of order. They may want to respond.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There can be no further points: the answer was clear.

Dr. Bray: On another point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall take it if it is a new point of order.

Dr. Bray: The House is debating the civil service and the prior options study has been completed. The answers to the written questions on the Order Paper have been given to the Select Committee on Science and Technology.

Mr. Freeman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said. Those questions are not my Department's responsibility, but during the debate I shall ascertain what the position is and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to deal with it in his reply.

4.54 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I wish to discuss the prior options review, about which the points of order were made.

The phrase, "prior options review" is remarkably Stalinist. I do not propose to go down the track taken by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), but the idea that devolution in Scotland can be achieved without the most extraordinary upheaval in civil service and government generally is beyond belief.

In a touching ceremony on 30 April, only three weeks ago, my noble Friend Baroness Chalker gave my noble Friend Baroness Young a large golden or gilded key that fitted the buildings in my constituency formerly known as HMS Pembroke, which for the past eight years have housed the natural resources institute of the Overseas Development Administration. The keys were handed over by the ODA to the university of Greenwich in what may be the first of several such handovers from the public to the private sector.

The university of Greenwich will manage the NRI on behalf of a powerful consortium that consists of itself, Imperial college London, Wye agricultural college and the university of Edinburgh. I believe that the handover will be good for the NRI, which relies largely on commercial contracts for its resources. It will certainly be good for the consortium of four powerful universities and it will be especially good for the university of Greenwich because it involves the injection of a centre of scientific excellence that has world renown for its research. That will lift the research component of the university of Greenwich. The site is particularly well located alongside the university's recently arrived school of earth sciences, which shares part of the buildings once known as HMS Pembroke, which were occupied by the Navy in the days of the Royal Navy base at Chatham.

Greenwich is a thrusting and ambitious university. It was a polytechnic for 100 years but it is a young university. It is trying to rationalise its many sites into five campuses. Hon. Members will know of its bid, which is believed to be successful, for the Royal Naval college at Greenwich. The NRI in its former naval buildings is an excellent fit and addition to the university's research capacity, especially as its membership of the consortium forges links with pre-eminent academic institutions. This will be the forerunner of many public sector research establishments moving from the public sector to the sort of private sector that the consortium represents.

The NRI was ready for the change thanks to the excellent work of its director until the handover, who is working closely with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Thanks are also due to his staff over the period since it became an agency.

Last Friday, my wife and I visited the Horticultural Research International establishment at East Malling in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). Its headquarters is at Wellesbourne and was mentioned in the brief intervention of the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Howarth), who I am sorry to see is no longer in his place. I went to discuss the research that is being done at East Malling with its director of external affairs, Dr. Flegg. He was able to show me some of the important work on hops, apples, pears, strawberries, raspberries and cherries. That work is important for Kent—the garden of England. In Kent, we depend for our horticultural excellence on many small and medium-sized growers, who frequently market through co-operatives and who would certainly not be able to undertake strategic research of the type that is undertaken by HRI.

There is great concern at HRI, and I propose to paraphrase extensively from its chief executive's letter, which may have been sent to other hon. Members. HRI staff are worried that HRI, although it may one day be ready for privatisation—perhaps to the university sector, as has happened to the natural resources institute—is not currently ready for privatisation, mainly because it is not sufficiently robust financially.

I do not hold the view expressed by the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists that privatisation should never take place, and I find its briefing somewhat misleading and at least very selective in the quotes that it gives us from the prior options review guidelines. I agree with certain points that it makes, however, and especially that:

"The scientific activities undertaken by public sector research establishments are often of a long term nature. Security of funding and freedom from constant contractual and organisational upheaval are required to enable them to flourish."

An example is marine studies undertaken in the interests of the environment by scientists for the Natural Environmental Research Council.

IPMS also says that it is very important to maintain the independence and integrity of such research establishments in the advice that they give to farmers on, for example, pollution, which is currently provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I am much taken with the arguments of Professor Payne, the chief executive of Horticulture Research International. He has expressed concern that decisions will be taken by Ministers about the future of HRI in the very near future, and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is worried that those decisions may have been taken, although the information is not available to us in written answers. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to clear that up.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): Although this subject is not within my Department's responsibility, we are checking the position at the moment. We understand that the written answers are being tabled and are on their way to hon. Members; I apologise for any delay that hon. Members have experienced in receiving them. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy is pursuing the matter.

Mr. Couchman: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. He will understand that my remarks are obviously made in ignorance of what may be in those written answers, which are not yet available to us.

It is very important to continue to provide strong research and development for the United Kingdom's horticultural industry. The rapid changes in ownership of HRI might compromise that strength, and I hope that when Ministers take these decisions they will be conscious of the need to maintain HRI as a centre of excellence for horticultural research and development. It currently operates in the public sector for the public good, and it is already the product of several earlier rationalisations.

There are, I believe, six sites, including the headquarters at Wellesbourne, the site at East Malling, three outposts and a small presence at Wye college. If HRI moves towards the private sector, it may move to a university situation rather than to full-blown privatisation. It is extremely unlikely that that especially important research establishment could be supported by its industry, which, as I have said, is made up primarily of unsubsidised small and medium-sized businesses, none of which could support a research programme of the nature that is available.

I hope that the example of the movement of the natural resources institute from the public sector to the private sector—from the Overseas Development Administration to the university of Greenwich—will be a forerunner for many other institutes in the public sector. Those establishments are important, they are centres of excellence, and the university sector is probably the most appropriate place for them to be transferred to.

Mr. Ingram: Is there not a danger that, if the university sector takes over some of these research institutes, it will cherry-pick some of the best aspects of the work and other activities will be cut because they do not fit comfortably into the university sector? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is therefore not necessarily the best solution in every case, regardless of the circumstances?

Mr. Couchman: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. Fragmentation of the HRI establishments would be a detriment to the integrity of the whole, and I hope that, if a consortium such as the one that took over the natural resources institute takes over the HRI, it will take it over completely and continue with the excellence of its work.

I hope that the consortium that took over NRI might pick up the HRI establishments, for that would be a very comfortable and excellent fit, especially as one of the major campuses that has been developed by the university of Greenwich is situated a very few miles away from the East Malling research establishment.

The final thing that worries me slightly about that proposal is that the East Malling establishment is on land that is not in the public sector. It is owned not by the Crown but by a trust, and there is no great security of tenure for the establishment at East Malling.

In the interests of the horticultural industry in Kent—a very important industry in the garden of England—I hope that Ministers will hear what I have said today about the need to ensure that HRI is maintained as an integrated entity, whether in the public sector or ultimately in the private sector, and that its strength is protected through whatever change is proposed.

5.6 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I am a strong, unrepentant supporter of the idea of a permanent, politically impartial, honest, accountable civil service with selection and promotion on merit, and I believe that such a civil service is one of the hallmarks of an advanced democratic society. As the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee said, the British civil service is a great national asset, whose commitment to the highest standards of performance and conduct is a guarantee of constitutional and financial propriety as well as of good government.

Throughout the 20th century, especially in two world wars, the British civil service, as reformed by Northcote-Trevelyan, has served the nation extremely well. It has been used as a model by many other countries and, as Ministers know well, very often people come to see how we run our civil service because they think that its example is worth following.

It is true that any civil service needs to adapt to changing conditions, and from the 1960s onwards, with the Fulton committee, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) was a consultant, there has been a series of changes. In the 1980s there were the next steps agency changes, and two thirds of the civil service is now covered by those agencies. From 1992 onwards, there were the market testing, contracting out and privatisation reforms.

In my short contribution, I shall make three points. First, I believe that there is a danger of an excess of ideology. I strongly support efficiency changes; I oppose permanent revolution. I strongly supported the broad principle of agency status; I saw it as a natural conclusion, or extension, of the reforms suggested by Fulton and by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South. The purpose of the agency change was to improve service to the customer and citizen, to ensure devolved decision making and to improve accountability. These are excellent aims.

We on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee gave the reforms our bipartisan support throughout the late 1980s. The 1992 changes have not been carried out based on a consensus. On the contrary, it seems to me that market testing and contracting out have been used in a doctrinaire way—and they should not be. It also seems to me that the principle of cutting the number of people in the civil service is the wrong way to approach matters. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a morale crisis in the civil service.

It is not just me saying that—it is reflected in the survey of members of the First Division Association and in a recent poll in *The Observer*. Any Government have to take this issue seriously—and I would have thought that the Government would take it much more seriously than they are. When we in the Treasury Select Committee asked for a survey of the members, the Government refused—and we drew our own conclusions from that.

Things have gone too far and the Deputy Prime Minister's Department has moved too quickly. It would be unkind to say that it is an old man in a hurry. There have been four privatisations in a short time and we have only just managed to save the Civil Service College. This is overdoing it. Recruitment and Assessment Services is a privatisation too far.

No one says that Recruitment and Assessment Services is not efficient. In fact, the Minister said—as far as I could understand his argument—that it is so efficient it should be allowed to expand in the private sector. No one has said that it has any impact on the public sector borrowing requirement. Indeed, I understand that when Lord Bancroft asked that question in the House of Lords he was told that the impact would be negligible.

This seems to strike at the heart of one of the key principles of the civil service: fair and open competition. In principle, it is inherently dangerous and unstable not to have recruitment to the civil service run by the civil service. It is not surprising that that was rejected by the House of Lords. I believe that this reform has no consensus behind it at all. It should be delayed until after the general election.

I refer to politicisation. It is not a question of political appointees in the civil service or Ministers appointing Tories to posts. When a Government have been in power for so long—as Lord Callaghan put it to the Treasury Select Committee—civil servants pick up the scent and begin to present Ministers with what they want to hear rather than with impartial evidence. That is unprofessional, and it is against the civil service code. Of course, a change in Government would help and it is not surprising that many civil servants would like to see another Government in power—not necessarily because they support the Labour party. They believe that a new Government would be good for our democracy.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: This is a serious point and I recognise that the hon. Gentleman is characteristically putting it in a serious and logical way. However, is there not an inconsistency? With great respect to Lord Callaghan and to Labour Members, the Labour party has not been in a position to have received that advice. It is making it up—it does not know whether it is true. From personal experience and from the experience of my colleagues who have served in government, it is not true.

Mr. Radice: I am quoting—

Dr. Spink : Guessing.

Mr. Radice: No, I am quoting the First Division Association, the trade union of the civil service. It presented evidence to the Select Committee—it is not a question of hearsay; it is serious evidence. It is not good enough just to have a change of Government and to rely on that. Therefore, we should have a civil service code. I am glad to know that the Labour party believes that it should be put on a statutory basis. We need to protect civil servants by asserting the values of the civil service and by giving them an appeals system with an independent basis.

In the run-up to the election, I would like to hear the head of the civil service make it absolutely clear that it will not be used by the party in power in an unprofessional partisan way. I have heard of some incidents of this taking place, and I hope that it does not continue. I say this in all seriousness, as someone who wants to see the civil service remain impartial. I hope that Conservative Members take that point seriously, not in a partisan way—I do not mean to make it partisan.

The important issue of parliamentary accountability is raised by the managerial changes and we have not faced up to it. If we devolve powers, how do we ensure that the

agency heads and the agencies are responsible to Parliament? We are trying to grapple with that. As the Minister knows, the Treasury Select Committee suggested that agency chiefs should be able to account to Select Committees in their own right. This is already happening—although I accept that they consult their Ministers first.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) pointed out, Scott has raised disturbing issues about accountability and civil servants not taking their duties and responsibilities seriously, particularly in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in the Ministry of Defence and in the Department of Trade and Industry. They are not seeing it as their duty to inform Parliament about what is going on and they are conniving with Ministers to keep Parliament and the Select Committees in the dark. That is not good enough. We need to assert our position in Parliament.

I am glad that the Select Committee is looking at the issue of ministerial and civil service accountability. I hope that we will be able to report before the end of the summer on these issues and that we will come up with something that may be of use to the Government and to the Opposition. If the Conservative party is in opposition after the election, it will want a proper code of accountability—it will be useful to it, too. I hope that we get bipartisan support for some changes.

The civil service is extremely important to this country and to our democracy. It is the duty of the Government and the Opposition to support the civil service and the values on which it is based. It is the duty of civil servants to assert those principles. If they do not, it will not be surprising if others start to ride roughshod over them.

In conclusion, the civil service is a great national asset and it is absolutely essential that we preserve it and develop it in the years ahead.

5.19 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House for arriving after my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had begun his speech. Unfortunately, I was caught in traffic. However, I heard most of his comments and I followed closely his remarks about the Government's proposals regarding recruitment and career development in the civil service. I shall add very little to his comments except to respond to the observations of the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice).

The hon. Gentleman described the civil service as being in a state of permanent revolution. I do not see it that way. We are beyond the extensive and far-reaching reforms that were made to the civil service some 100 years ago. As the nature of the Government changes in order to perform different tasks, it is inevitable that the nature of the civil service should change also. I believe that most of those changes have been for the better and that they take into account the needs, desires, qualities and career prospects of civil servants.

We are extremely fortunate that people of the highest calibre seek careers in the civil service. The civil service is not bereft of talent: the selection boards can choose from a wide range of candidates. Many civil servants serve for decades with great distinction. We are also enormously fortunate—if only we knew all the facts—that our civil service is not tainted by corruption. Civil servants all over the world are in it on the sly for money. That is not the case in Britain: over the years, few civil servants have been caught taking bribes or engaging in other illegal activities. Our civil service is of the highest standard and I think that civil servants should be more widely appreciated. Their good instincts should be nurtured—we must not take high standards for granted.

I wish to make several observations that have become more pertinent over the four years of this Parliament. My first concern is leaks. When I was a boy and a student of the workings of Government and of the civil service, leaks were a rare event and they were big news when they occurred. It is in the nature of politics that it sometimes serves politicians' interests to slip information into the public domain in some way. They do so in order to advance their cause or to gain some advantage in an argument.

We can usually tell when information is leaked for party political purposes. However, in the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of leaks that can originate only from within the civil service. They are easy to recognise because they do not advantage a politician from the Government party who is in dispute with another. Such leaks are becoming too prevalent. Civil servants—it may be only a few who are at fault—should adhere to the code of conduct which states that they must respect the secrecy of the information with which they are entrusted.

The media have an insatiable appetite for leaked information. As soon as the word "leak" is attached to a story, it becomes sensational. It adds an exciting ingredient to otherwise ordinary and mundane information. As the spin doctors would say, it gives a story legs.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is remarkable how often Labour Front-Bench spokesmen purport to quote from internal memorandums between Departments and between Ministers?

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Two parties are involved in leaking information: the giver of the information and its recipient. We often find that documents or information are not leaked directly to the BBC: they are usually leaked to the Opposition, who then give that information to the BBC. I think that the Labour party should examine its conduct and the way in which it uses the information that comes into its hands in that manner.

If there are leaks and if there is no measure of secrecy and confidentiality in Government, policy making becomes impossible. The Opposition have charged some of their Front-Bench spokesmen with the task of thinking the unthinkable. The Opposition do that already to a certain extent—although not very well—and the Government must do that as well. The thinking does not stop when a party gains office: policy making must continue. One cannot think the unthinkable, discuss, debate and throw ideas around to be digested and honed into policy if the discussion process takes place in public.

The argument for open government has become simplistic. We cannot have open government when it comes to policy formulation if we also want good, effective and decisive presentation of that policy. One cannot arrive at a coherent decision from a mess of

[Mr. Duncan]

argument. The increasing habit of leaking documents mid-stream in the policy-making process is making the conduct of Government and the presentation of policy almost impossible. As the Opposition approve of whistleblowing—that is a popular new term—perhaps from time to time Labour Members will blow the whistle on those who leak documents to them which they then use for underhand purposes. We must be able to discuss policy, to argue and to differ about policy, and then to decide when policy will be made public. That is impossible if information may be leaked to a newspaper or to the BBC halfway through the process.

My second concern relates to the question of how some Government policies and legislation are implemented. The legislation that is passed in the House and becomes law is written in language that we consider to be appropriate to the circumstances. If we are honest, we must admit that our law-making process is not perfect. The process of examining legislation line by line in Committee is far from perfect. Many ill-thought-out turns of phrase remain in Bills which become Acts and are then implemented—quite properly in many respects—to the letter.

We have an exact culture of law making and implementation of that law. We do not express wishes in legislation: we detail the rules that should be followed. However, we cannot foresee all the circumstances in which the rules may be applied. For example, European Community directives are the product of a law-making culture that is very different from our own. The literal interpretation of the tiny details of law is becoming increasingly intolerable for many who must bear the consequences. There is growing exasperation about the overly literal implementation of regulation at all levels.

The courts may now assess legislation according to Parliament's express intention when it passed that law. In other words, judges may take account of the words used by Ministers at the Dispatch Box or in Committee. I believe that that is a pretty iffy process because it is liable to reduce the inclination to make legislation exact and black and white. We would be pegging our hopes on judges realising that remarks made in this Chamber might be taken into account. It is absurd to imagine that judges would read through *Hansard* and implement what was said.

The application of rules at an administrative level is becoming too rigid, particularly with EC directives, business regulations and the Health and Safety Executive. The man from the Ministry is not required to suspend all initiative when applying rules defined by the House. Initiative can still be deployed, so that the official can pass back up the line the express concerns of the people affected by the rules and regulations in question. The same applies to Ministers. An autobiography by a Minister whose name I have forgotten is entitled "Ministers Decide". Ministers decide less and less because more and more they are bound by rules, many of them from the European Union, and they no longer have the discretion to decide.

One example of the petty detail that is applied when implementing rules is export licences. Setting aside post-Scott paranoia, constituents of mine have produced examples of export licences that have taken six months to authorise. How can anyone export when a civil servant takes six months to process a licence? That is a self-created brake on our export potential. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider whether the citizens charter standards cannot be applied to that function of the Department of Trade and Industry, to ensure that export licences can—for the benefit of productive British companies that want to sell overseas—be processed more efficiently. Many companies feel that they do not have an effective right of appeal against that inordinate delay.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend contrast the way in which we apply rules with French practice? Does he agree with the axiom that rules are for the blind obedience of fools and for the careful guidance of managers and officials?

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend is right, because in many cases the French ignore or avoid the rules altogether.

My final point concerns politicisation. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) did not answer the question that I put in my intervention. If Labour entered office, it would immediately make a political appointment to the job of press secretary at 10 Downing street. Labour would—it has never said this in public, but in private briefings that could be denied—make ministerial offices have far more political appointees to them. The statutory registering of the political affiliation of persons appointed to public bodies is a step towards McCarthyite censorship, which is a dangerous path to tread.

There have been comments about Ministers moving from ministerial jobs to private sector appointments. The reverse, in terms of influence, could happen. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) must consider whether what is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander. Is it not wrong, at least in his terms, for the hon. Gentleman to have represented in the House the interests of the First Division Association of civil servants, then—hot on the heels of that responsibility—take the post of Front-Bench spokesman for the Office of Population and Census? If moving from a Government post to the private sector is the peddling of influence, why is not that which the hon. Member for Hartlepool has done?

5.33 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The debate is hindered by the fact that we did not have access to a series of parliamentary answers that affect the privatisation of scientific parts of the civil service in particular. That matter was raised by the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) and by me, in points of order. I must say at the outset that the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service could not have been more helpful in personally ascertaining why those answers were not available and delivering copies of such answers as were available to me because I could not leave the Chamber at the time. The Department of Trade and Industry must have known the subject of this afternoon's debate, so the long delay in making answers available is not at all satisfactory. Some of us were aware that the answers were to be given, but still they were late, while others are not yet to hand.

One of those parliamentary answers reveals that the Institute of Arable Crops Research, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, the John Innes

Centre and the Silsoe Research Institute have all been identified as leaving the public sector, while a number of other institutes are identified as more appropriate for executive agencies within the public sector. Those matters are relevant to the debate, in which a number of privatisation candidates have been identified—even in the Government motion.

The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred to the East Malling research institute. I hope that Ministers will note that the hon. Gentleman had a number of reservations about what might happen, even though he does not oppose in principle a change in that institute's status. I remember that institute particularly well because my wife worked there as a student. It is one of a number of scientific centres that play an important part in ensuring long-term scientific research of relevance to industry, governed by long-term considerations rather than near-market, short-term decisions—which can more readily be financed on a short-term basis.

As to Recruitment and Assessment Services, the Government must be chastened not just by the defeat that they sustained in the other place but by the weight of informed opinion forcefully expressed in that debate. It must be significant that so many people with long experience of government felt that the RAS is crucial to maintaining the impartiality, integrity and reputation of the civil service. In the Minister's discussions with the Public Service Select Committee, I hope that he will constantly keep in mind what was said in the debate in the other place. I have no continuing interest in the Civil Service College, but I taught there many years ago—particularly at its then centre in Edinburgh. The Government have at least been forced to recognise how powerful would be the opposition to that activity being outside the public sector.

The prospect of privatisation is causing concern in many other organisations. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) drew my attention to the Institute for Animal Health. With all the current international arguments about animal health, it is of great concern that that institute is a possible candidate for privatisation. Many such institutions are involved in international committees in which their counterparts are public service scientific bodies. We must be careful that our ability to make our case effectively in international scientific bodies is not impaired because it can be argued that we are represented by scientists from privatised institutions—perhaps commercially sponsored—rather than from organisations performing a regulatory role on behalf of the Government.

The constitutional issues are the other main focus of the debate. Gladstone said that the British constitution

"presumes more boldly than any other the good faith of those who work it."

Anxieties about the state of that good faith have been manifest. One party has been in office a long time, and it was led for a considerable period by a Prime Minister more noted for her determination to get things done than for paying attention to the processes by which they were done or the condition in which the system of government would be left when she finished. The attitudes cultivated during that period, which are summed up by phrases such as, "He's not one of us," were of potentially long-term damage to the public service. The present Prime Minister entered office with a desire to correct some of those trends, but I am not sure that he has been entirely successful. We must therefore consider impartiality, codes of practice, and the accountability of Ministers to Parliament.

The Government were driven into a civil service code. I sat on the Treasury Select Committee with the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) and argued strongly for such a code, but a series of other events eventually forced Ministers to recognise the need for one. Many doubts and anxieties about the code's effectiveness remain, particularly when civil servants have to go through the permanent secretary of their own Department before they can get to the first civil service commissioner.

When people fear that they may be impairing any future chance of promotion by drawing attention to what they feel is improper pressure on them to act in a particular way, they are loth to take such a step. There are people in many walks of life who are prepared to take their case to the limit and perform a public service by so doing, but not many of them benefit their careers in the process. We are often indebted to those who put their careers on the line, in the public service or in private industry, by being prepared to take their case to the limit; but they often suffer for so doing.

The FDA states that one of the main issues about which civil servants have complained to the association under the code has been requests for political briefings—briefings for Ministers to use at party conferences or for answering parliamentary questions. It requires some courage on the part of civil servants to take such complaints right to the top.

The Scott report gives us every reason to fear that the code by itself does not offer sufficient protection. The FDA quotes one cynical civil servant's suggestion that three drafts for answering parliamentary questions will be put before Ministers in future: a draft that accords with "Questions of Procedure for Ministers"; a draft that deliberately withholds information but does not knowingly mislead; and a draft that designedly leads Parliament to believe that one policy is in place when the overwhelming evidence is to the contrary—but does so unintentionally. We wait to see which draft the Minister will choose.

I find it difficult to understand how those who produced the summary of the Scott report issued by the Cabinet Office to the press could possibly have imagined that they were operating within the terms of the code. That summary was tendentious and grossly misleading; it deliberately excluded all items that might raise questions about what Ministers or civil servants had done or about what should happen in future. In no way did it uphold the political impartiality of the civil service.

It was one of the most damaging features of the whole publication of the Scott report that the Cabinet Office should have taken responsibility for a document that was so clearly party political in its purpose and that did not inform recipients of the burden of the report or of the conclusions that might be drawn from it.

The ethical questions that confront civil servants extend more widely than what we know as the civil service. We can no longer talk about a civil service ethic; we have to talk about a wider public service ethic that might apply to the agencies and non-departmental organisations which have taken over so many of the responsibilities of the traditional civil service. It could be argued that the same

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is equally relevant to local government, which has developed its own way of tackling those issues, in the form of rules and codes, over a century of facing similar challenges. The public draw no distinction between those various public bodies when they demand fairness, competence, integrity, impartiality and the right to challenge decisions through the democratic process or via an appeals mechanism.

As Government functions have been contracted out to private agencies, the question has arisen: should not public service ethics be imported to those agencies for the carrying out of their functions? Defence contractors have long been subject to the Official Secrets Act 1911 in respect of the Government work that they do. How could any Government contemplate entrusting people's tax records to a private agency if its staff are not subject to civil service rules?

That dispersal of public service functions to a variety of institutions means that it no longer makes sense to talk of a code of ethics peculiar to the traditional civil service. The objective must surely be to encompass all the organisations in a code of ethics and to develop a mechanism to that end. That is why I expressed sympathy with the idea of a public services commission wider than the present civil service commission. We would propose a public services commission with a wider remit, responsible for the operation of the rules governing appointments and terms of service in national, regional and local government. It would be required to ensure that the principles of a politically neutral civil service, appointed on merit, were observed. We would want to insulate the commission from ministerial interference by having its membership determined by the new Public Service Select Committee of the House, to which it would report.

The commission could help the whistleblower's role, by investigating claims from members of the public service of breaches of the regulations governing its operation, and of improper conduct towards officials by Ministers. Such a role would be rather wider in our proposed format than one played by a civil service commission alone. Next steps agencies should be on a clear statutory footing, and the framework documents setting out how they work should also be statutory and considered by Select Committees.

I want also to refer to the wider question of ministerial responsibility, which has come up several times in the debate already. When we debated the matter on a Liberal Democrat motion on 12 February, the public service Minister said:

"While a Minister has full constitutional accountability to Parliament for everything that the Department does, it is manifestly impossible for him to take all decisions, or be personally involved in every action of his Department. It cannot, therefore, be sensibly suggested that a Minister is personally responsible for every action of his Department. It is worth stressing that distinction, because the terms 'ministerial accountability' and 'ministerial responsibility' have tended to be used interchangeably."—[*Official Report*, 12 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 684.]

In my submission, they can indeed be used interchangeably because there is no proper distinction between the two terms. There is nothing for which a Minister is accountable to the House for which he is not also responsible to the House.

That is not to say that the House would hold a Minister personally responsible for a failing of which he had no prior knowledge and which did not result from his actions or failures. The House would hold him constitutionally responsible but might conclude that he could not reasonably be expected to resign. The classic example was Lord Whitelaw, who considered that he was responsible for the fact that someone got into the Queen's bedroom; but no one in the House thought that he should resign as an example to others. We clearly recognised that there was no fault on his part—and no fault in the setting up of the systems and procedures for which he might have been held responsible.

It is for the House to judge whether the extent of a Minister's responsibility is so personal, or whether an issue is so fundamental, that a resignation ought to be demanded. It is also for his colleagues in Government to consider whether his resignation should be exacted from him.

Mr. Couchman: I am fascinated by what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. Why, then, did some hon. Members the other day demand the resignation of the Home Secretary because of dirty equipment in a forensic laboratory?

Mr. Beith: Although I often demand the resignation of the Home Secretary, for reasons that I shall elaborate on in a moment, I did not do so on that occasion—although I thought it reasonable to criticise the Home Office for not ensuring that such tests were carried out with equipment that could be shown to be satisfactory. The Home Secretary, as hon. Members will hear, is crucial to my argument and I shall come to him in a moment.

I want to dispose, first, of the spurious notion—I am sorry to see it put about by a civil servant of the experience and ability of Sir Robin Butler—that there is a distinction between a Minister's responsibility and his accountability. The political process judges whether to exact the resignation of a Minister, but his responsibility remains the same at all times.

It is not just constitutionally repugnant but, in terms of modern management practice, inefficient to give people duties to carry out while leaving an aura of confusion about who is responsible if those duties are not properly carried out. There have been some terrifying examples of this in recent Government actions. From the day of the Westland case, when Lady Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, declined to accept the political consequences of what had happened or to discipline any civil servant for it, there opened up a gaping hole in our constitution. In such a situation, either a civil servant had acted improperly and should have been disciplined, or a Minister had given a civil servant instructions that ought not to have been given. In that case, the Minister should take the political consequences of so doing. That also applies to the Home Secretary. The greatest confusion surrounding the doctrine of ministerial responsibility has been created by Ministers who like an aura of fog and mystery around who is responsible for anything as it enables them to deny ever having been responsible for anything that is to their detriment.

A classic example is the Home Secretary, who interferes extensively in the policies and activities of the Prison Service agency. He defends doing so on powerful

grounds. He believes that there is a public interest in his intervening to make sure that a particular governor is removed or to decide what the salary of a particular governor should be. In at least some cases, he can probably sustain his argument. However, he cannot then say that anything that goes wrong in the Prison Service cannot be his responsibility as he is concerned only with broad policy.

Not only do Ministers make specific interventions that may lead to mistakes for which they subsequently disavow responsibility, but agency staff know that they are expected to act in ways of which of the Minister would approve and the Minister's periodic interventions serve to reinforce that belief. The pretence that the Government have created a cocooned series of institutions in which Ministers' interventions are confined to the broadest matters of policy—clearly understood and easily set down on a piece of paper—is unsustainable. The doctrine of ministerial responsibility and Ministers' accountability to the House is being destroyed to protect individual Ministers in particular circumstances.

Under every Government of any party, Ministers will come to Dispatch Box and attempt to explain away a particular action and their responsibility for it. We all know that we have to deal with that and join the political argument. However, it is not acceptable for a Government to destroy the entire doctrine on which Ministers are held responsible to the House to protect individual Ministers in particular circumstances. That is exactly what they are doing when they pretend that agency status allows Ministers to insulate themselves against the day-to-day operations of Departments. That is not the case. As long as Ministers engage in such intervention, they preserve a culture in which it cannot be true. The Minister's explanation of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility in the debate on 12 February maintained that fiction and furthered the damage that has already been done.

We need a whole series of reforms to protect our civil service from being further damaged and undermined. The most obvious requirement is a freedom of information Act so that the public will know when decisions were taken on the wrong basis and we will not need a Scott inquiry, except in those circumstances—which were present in the Scott case—into which a freedom of information act cannot reasonably extend as they involve intelligence and security matters. It is also vital that even now, while the Government are still in power, they do something to rescue a doctrine on which they will want to rely when they occupy the Opposition Benches.

5.52 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Just when one thought one understood a point that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was making, he would contradict himself so that his speech became completely opaque. When he studies *Hansard* tomorrow, at least privately, he will be forced to accept what I say. However, he is a Liberal, and one expects that from Liberal policy formation.

I shall make three points. First, we need an open civil service. People need to know what the civil service is doing, how it is doing it and what the guidelines are. Of course, civil servants need to know what their responsibilities are and what the guidelines are. Therefore, the code that has been discussed is most welcome, particularly in the way that it has been put together—with consensus.

Everyone knows what the code is, as it is published. It is characteristic of the Government to publish information that has not been published before and to acknowledge organisations such as Cabinet Committees that past Labour Governments were not prepared to admit existed. However, to put a legally enforced code on the statute book would achieve absolutely nothing. It would be a field day for lawyers—and for barrack-room lawyers as well—but it would achieve nothing constructive, and would damage the institution that it was supposed to serve.

Mr. Derek Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government were against the code for a long time?

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman will accept that the Government said that most of what is now in the code was already in place. That is why, at the time, some far-sighted Ministers accepted that a code should be published.

Secondly, we need a civil service that recruits the best, and fairly promotes them. It is reasonable to say that the civil service has a pretty good record in recruiting and promoting women. However, I am not suggesting that it is perfect.

Mr. Garrett: Except permanent secretaries.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, "Except permanent secretaries." I am not sure whether that is true.

Mr. Garrett: How many are there?

Mr. Hughes: There is one specific permanent secretary, others have the rank of permanent secretary, and there are many others in deputy positions. The position is improving. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his view, but I believe that the systems are open, and the recruitment of good-quality women civil servants is going very well.

I am also pleased that the civil service continues to attract an increasing number of people from our black and Asian communities. It is by no means good enough yet. I hope that, before my hon. Friend replies to the debate, his civil servants will inform him of the points that I am making.

Mr. Garrett: Where is he?

Mr. Hughes: We all have to leave the Chamber sometimes. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say something about the further progress that is being made in that regard.

One problem is that people from black and Asian communities do not have role models in the civil service to make them regard it as a place where they would succeed in making a good career. That is a real stumbling block. I recall being told by RAS that one of the reasons why there were not many black or Asian people in the fast stream entry for a particular year was that those who applied were not good enough. So I went through the applications, and RAS was right. We have to find a way to provide role models to attract bright young black and Asian people into the civil service.

[Mr. Hughes]

Thirdly, we should have a civil service that serves the Government loyally, but is able to serve any Government. More nonsense has been spoken about that than about anything else in the debate. Although I recognise that the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) was not making a specific party political point, it demonstrates that, because the Labour party has been out of power for so long, it is completely out of touch. Some in the civil service trade unions will also seek to make that point, but I simply do not believe it to be true; nor is it true in my experience.

I had no idea about the politics of the civil servants with whom I came into contact as a Minister, nor did I want to know. However, I knew that some of the civil servants in senior positions had served loyally in the private offices of Ministers in the last Labour Government. I was also quite clear that the people who served me and other Ministers would be able to serve an incoming Labour Government with equal loyalty. That is what counts. I know that the Labour party doubts that, and thinks that the civil service has been politicised. I have heard some disgraceful remarks.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): The hon. Gentleman protests too much.

Mr. Hughes: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, the reason why I protest is that he has made some disgraceful remarks on the Floor of the House in previous debates.

Mr. Mandelson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hughes: Oh, yes. He has suggested that the civil service has been politicised, of which he should be ashamed—but he is not. To suggest that is a calumny not on the Government but on civil servants.

One reason why the Labour party thinks that the civil service has been politicised is evident in local government. The Labour party does not understand the difference between politicians and council officers. That is why there is such switching between Labour councillors and officers and councillors in one authority and officers in another. That is not good enough. It is dangerous nonsense if the Labour party thinks that that is the way in which the civil service should be run.

We have heard much talk about advice given to Ministers and which answers are given to questions. If Labour Members think that things have changed under the Government, they should read the book "How to be a Minister", by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), which is as true now as it was when he wrote it after leaving the previous Labour Government.

Let us be clear: Ministers are politicians; they give political answers. Civil servants give the information on which those answers are based. The Minister is responsible for the answer, and if the answer is highly political, it is because the Minister has chosen to give such an answer. That has always been true, and always will be. To suggest that somehow politics will end and answers will be based merely on information provided by the civil service is nonsense.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) proved that the Labour party is the captive of the unions. It can move sideways or backwards, but it has no mechanism for moving forward. It will not dare to be radical about the civil service, for fear that it would further widen Labour rifts.

Of course, Members of another place who were senior civil servants or Ministers years ago think that Recruitment and Assessment Services is essential to preserving the civil service's integrity. Indeed it used to be, but thinking that is a throwback to many years ago, when, if one wanted to recruit a junior secretary or a clerk to any far-flung branch of the civil service, one had to go to the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Garrett: No, one did not.

Mr. Hughes: It is not like that any more. That is what those in the other place believe. Characteristically, the hon. Gentleman thinks that he knows better. The service is not needed. It has talented staff, and such talent should be more widely available. Of course, those staff will do well in the private sector. Many of the organisation's trumpeted successes have been achieved because it employs private sector headhunters to bring in people they want to recruit.

All large organisations have to tackle the enemies of change. We have heard the speeches of such enemies from the Labour Benches. It is suggested that many dragons have to be slain—traditionalists, xenophobes, devil's advocates and technophobes. I do not think that there are any dragons to slay in this debate. We have heard speeches from the same old Labour carthorse—not a dragon, but one old carthorse. For all its new Labour razzmatazz, the Labour party cannot disguise the fact that that carthorse is out of date, does not think very clearly, moves too slowly to be of any use, and is terrified of change.

This debate goes to the heart of why new Labour is simply a sham. In a fast-changing world, Labour would have us believe that the civil service is the only thing that should not change. Britain has a dynamic and growing economy because our private sector has grasped change, and much of it is thriving on that change. A civil service that does not change will ossify and die. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Office of Public Service have grasped change, made the changes and preserved the essential integrity of our civil service. They should be congratulated on that, not criticised.

6.4 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): It is a gross discourtesy that there is no Minister on the Front Bench to reply to the debate. If that is a trend, it is quite deplorable.

For the past 30 years, since I was a consultant to the Fulton committee on the civil service, I have worked in, worked for, written about and generally shadowed developments in the civil service. In recent years, I have done so with mounting dismay. In addition, I have a constituency interest, since more than 2,000 of my constituents are employed as civil servants in scientific research establishments, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the CCTA.

I have seen nothing less than the literal disintegration of the civil service. Twenty years ago, there were about 25 mainstream Government Departments in the civil service.

Each was responsible for policy and its implementation. From the Minister and permanent secretary and the policy decision, to the delivery of service to the citizen through local and regional offices, there was a fully integrated national civil service.

We are now well on the way to a disintegrated Government, consisting of 25 headquarters Departments, more than 120 agencies, 4,000 quangos and countless private contracts. That conglomerate structure makes for inadequate control, as many policies cross unit boundaries. It will end the concept of a national civil service, and it wrecks parliamentary accountability, because Select Committees cannot keep track of such a large variety of executive and policy organisations. Quangos and contracts encourage too much patronage. The disintegrated structure will massively complicate performance measurement and appraisal, and lead to wide variations in the quality of service.

It is true that the civil service of years ago was too hierarchical, with administrative mandarins lording it over professionally qualified specialists and executive-class managers. There was far too little scope for upward movement for talented people who did not have the right social and educational qualifications. That is still largely true. The civil service maintains the discredited and elitist administrative fast stream, which guarantees a route to the top for Oxbridge arts graduates—white, male, public school Oxbridge arts graduates—while boasting of its progress in the development of management and opportunities for managers.

I cannot see any justification, if there ever was any, for an administrative fast stream. When the Treasury and Civil Service Committee considered the matter, civil service management said that the administrative fast stream in the civil service was no different from graduate entry arrangements anywhere else. The management used arrangements at British Petroleum as a comparator.

I worked for British Petroleum for a number of years, and noticed how it was possible for an accountant or an engineer to get on the company's board. It is far more difficult—in fact, virtually impossible—for an accountant or an engineer to become a permanent secretary in Britain, even in a technical Department such as the Department of Trade and Industry. Top management in the civil service is still recruited as a political secretariat and not as a management cadre, as Fulton pointed out 30 years ago.

I have always been impressed by visits to the Ecole Nationale D'Administration in Paris to examine the formation of the French higher civil service, especially its output of people who combine political, economic and technical skills. That professional civil service has ensured France's success in the past 25 years. It is unbelievable that ENA has half a dozen professional staff, and that most instruction is carried out by serving top civil servants, who consider it an honour.

ENA is criticised in Britain as elitist, but in fact it is much less elitist than our system, because its entry arrangements allow junior civil servants to qualify and progress thereafter. The arrangements also allow for mature entrants who are aged about 40. Its top management cadre is not confined, like ours, to a particular social background.

I have always considered Sunningdale a white elephant. An enormous amount of money has been spent on it. One could call it an Oxbridge college with rhododendrons. It is totally divorced from the way in which the rest of the country is run. It would be far better for civil servants to be trained in Glasgow or Liverpool and to get some acquaintance with de-industrialised Britain. They should be action-trained in finding solutions to the problems faced by our fellow citizens.

The particular scandal of our disintegrated Government service is the quango. However, there is a certain amount of sense in having agencies. They were proposed by Fulton in 1968 as budgetary responsibility centres within Departments, and the idea was further developed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and myself in a Fabian pamphlet of the early 1970s called "Administrative Reform—the Next Steps". That is why, I assume, the agencies are called "next steps" agencies.

However, the information systems required to establish the managerial accountability of those agencies were never put in place, although they were needed to measure not only their operational efficiency but, much more importantly, their effectiveness in meeting public needs. The most obvious example of that lack of effectiveness is the Child Support Agency, where performance in respect of clients is nothing short of a disgrace.

What is needed is a system in which civil servants are originally employed in agencies, and are then promoted on merit to the policy division of the parent Department. That would close the experience gap between operations and policy-making.

Some, perhaps many, agencies are merely stages on the way to privatisation, as HMSO in my constituency has been. We have discussed HMSO several times recently, so I shall not dwell on the issue. However, the fact is that an effective operational arm of Government and Parliament is likely to suffer grievous damage as a result of privatisation, with massive job losses. Speaking as a House of Commons Commissioner, I believe that there is absolutely no guarantee of the long-term maintenance of services to Parliament. That could lead to the greatest embarrassment to Parliament in future. The privatisation will, I believe, be seen to be a mistake.

I am glad to see that the Minister is back in his place. Can he tell us about the future of the CCTA, which is also in my constituency? Will it be privatised, and what will be the likely consequences for computing expertise in Government?

I do not have the time to discuss public sector research establishments, as I wanted to do, partly because the information arrived so late. Here we have a number of scientific research establishments which have made a tremendous contribution to scientific policy-making, to discovery and to innovation. We now read that the presumption is for privatisation. That will lead to the disbandment of some of the finest research establishments in western Europe, with no gain for the public.

The growth of the quango has often been commented on. Essentially, quangos involve a function of Government, funded by Government, being carried out by a corporate body, the board of which is constituted by the patronage of a Minister. Training and enterprise councils are a good example. I cannot see how such organisations can be allowed to continue so free from democratic control in a democratic form of government. I trust that a Labour Government will reintegrate the quangos into

[Mr. John Garrett]

central and local government wherever possible, and that they will make their boards and their recruitment practice as open as possible.

It has always seemed wrong to me that the governance of the civil service should be under the royal prerogative, without statutory force. The White Paper contains a remarkable observation on that issue:

"The management of the Civil Service is one of the aspects of the Prerogative which is exercised by Ministers on behalf of the Crown . . . The Prerogative in this context resembles the power of other employers to employ without special legislative authority."

Employing civil servants is different from other employment; after all, they serve the Crown. The use of the royal prerogative gives them virtually no redress for a series of possibly adverse decisions against them. The most obvious is the ban on unions at GCHQ. We have a so-called code of practice which still does not cover major issues, such as the relationship of the civil service to Ministers, Parliament and the public.

The responsibilities of civil servants are specified in code and memoranda, not in law. The relationship of civil servants to Parliament and its Select Committees is specified in the Osmotherly rules—which, on the whole, say, "Don't say anything"—and not in law. The conduct of Ministers is laid out in a Cabinet paper which has no statutory force.

It is clear that we need a civil service Act which defines a civil servant, sets out the duties and responsibilities of civil servants to the Crown and to Parliament, and provides redress against the abuse of power and deception by Ministers. The penumbra of secrecy which surrounds so much of our policy-making—which Ministers, especially in this Government, so eagerly exploit—should be ended, or greatly reduced, by a freedom of information Act.

When we have debates on the civil service, we concentrate on the higher or senior civil service. But the greatest impact from loss of status, insecurity, loss of terms and benefits and outright redundancy has been on the junior levels of the civil service. They have suffered the most. Many have served on low pay which has been subject to income policies for years, and have been rewarded with redundancies and reduced terms and conditions.

The fact is that this Government despise their employees; that is why they treat their most junior employees so badly. There has been constant insecurity and lack of consultation. In HMSO, CCTA or the soon-to-be-privatised research establishments, the tremendously significant factor has been the lack of consultation that any decent employer would carry out with its employees. We had a civil service of which we could be proud. Now we have a civil service dominated by uncertainty, insecurity and plain disintegration.

6.15 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): It is an unequalled delight for me to follow the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), especially when he is talking about Cambridge. I recall that the previous time I followed him in a debate was across the floor of the Cambridge Union. He will remember that the debate concerned the economy, and that that evening, my side won the debate resoundingly, I am delighted to say.

I must make it clear that my constituents yearn for smaller government, whereas the Labour party—we have heard this all today—seeks bigger government. My constituents want smaller government in all its forms. They want less interference at all levels, whether regional, central or, particularly, European.

My constituents seek lower public spending as a proportion of our national wealth, because they see that as the way in which to continue to generate real wealth so that we can make the necessary investment in health and education, and so that we can care better for the people who are truly vulnerable. My constituents also see that as a way in which to reduce taxes which, in itself, will enable us to develop the enterprise economy that we all seek and which the Government have now at last delivered.

Lower public spending, lower taxes and smaller government in every way—that is what my constituents want. They also want a smaller civil service, because that comes with the rest. They want a more effective, more responsive and, in particular, a more customer-focused civil service.

Any debate on the civil service must be prefaced by the unequivocal statement that the British civil service is the best in the world. It has the highest level of integrity and the highest ethics; it is the least corrupt in the world. It is completely impartial. I was sorry to hear what the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) said, because he was entirely wrong. The civil service is impartial, and he cast aspersions on it by suggesting otherwise. As a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Home Office, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have worked closely with civil servants. I have noted that they are entirely impartial in giving advice to Ministers.

British civil servants have an impeccable record; they have great traditions and great credentials, and we must applaud that. However, having accepted all that, I now turn to the traditions, organisation and culture of the civil service. I want to review, somewhat philosophically, how the civil service operates, and how it delivers service to the public. I do so not to criticise or threaten the civil service, but to explore ways in which it can move forward, adapt and change, and to gently remind it whom it serves.

It could be said with some justification that the civil service management culture is sometimes a little too much based on tradition. In some spheres, it is sometimes a bit staid, although not in all. In some, there is magnificent, forward-looking practice, but risk avoidance is the phrase of the day in others—where one watches one's back, and where managers do not take brave and innovative actions. That type of culture can permeate right the way through those branches of the civil service.

I must say that tremendous strides forward have been made in the past 10 years. That is one reason why I welcome the Government's initiative today, to continue those improvements and to strengthen the civil service through training programmes—particularly the master of business administration programme, the best of which is offered in partnership with Crownfield university, an institution with which I have had more than a passing acquaintance.

I welcome the training review promised by the Minister today and the Government's "investment in people" programme, which is most important. I hope that some real progress will be made with those in future years.

I welcome the Government's initiative to impart new and modern disciplines. It includes contracting out, market testing, and, of course, bringing in payment by results when that is appropriate.

In this debate, I should like to focus on communication and on the civil service's management and organisation culture, because those are central to the success of any organisation—certainly to the civil service—in achieving its objectives. Today, hon. Members who belong to the all-party parliamentary group on management were told—at a meeting admirably chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson)—by Christopher Roebuck, the director of Cattle Consultancy, how important and central is communication. I should like to follow that theme.

Senior civil servants can very easily lose touch with the daily operations of their offices. They can be under enormous pressure from their political masters—their political customers—the hon. Members of this place. It is possible that those civil servants might take their eye off what is happening to their other—I believe more important—customers: the public. In short, they can easily lose sight of the heart of their business and lose focus on what their objectives should be and on how and whether those objectives are being achieved at the coal face.

My simple proposition is that front-line, support and administration staff do not lose touch. They often know very clearly what is best, what is happening and how to make the organisation more effective.; but, for their knowledge and skills to be useful to the organisation, they must operate in a culture in which their message can be heard and in which they are free and willing to give that message. I am not talking about specific incidents of whistleblowing or anything so specific; I am talking about the organisational culture, and the way in which the daily operations are run.

We must strengthen the link between professionals, senior management staff and the workers who deliver services—direct and face-to-face—to the public. That objective will be achieved by improved communication. It is as simple as that. But communication is, of course, a two-way process, and it is not at all simple.

I believe that downwards communication in the civil service is extremely effective and professional. The issuing of instructions, orders, rules and regulations is the nature of it, and they do it extremely well. Upwards communication—from workers back to management—in some spheres is a little less obviously good, if I may put it so gently. Upwards communication needs to have a very conducive and well-developed culture and climate to work well.

Cranfield university and Manchester business school are now carefully developing communication methods for those who will become top management and professional leaders. But perhaps we should think of ways of developing strategies, techniques and cultures in the established middle and senior management levels in the civil service.

Those managers must listen carefully to junior civil servants, who deal with the public, and they must encourage good communication. That does not mean a drink at the annual Christmas party or the grand walk-through and a back-slap once a month, as the top brass goes wandering through the office, saying that that is how they keep in touch with the workers. That is not the way to do it.

Communication means real listening. Listening is a difficult skill to acquire, but it is one of the key ingredients in inspired leadership. One must listen. Improved upwards communication can lead to improvement in the civil service's efficiency, particularly in the way in which it is perceived by the public, who rely so much on it.

I am not advocating employee empowerment or total quality management. Those concepts are not my game in this debate, although I do not dismiss them. My experience is that giving increased responsibility to those who do the work most often works very well, provided that it is done properly. I am not advocating those concepts today.

Leadership is not simply a question of running in front and hoping and expecting that everything will follow behind in an orderly and efficient manner. Leadership, good or bad, is given effect by communication in both directions, up and down—motivating and listening.

The civil service must continue its move into the modern era of management—which this Government are promoting with greater success than any previous Government of whom I have experience. The civil service must be prepared to change and to review and renew its objectives and the methods that it applies to secure those objectives. In short, it must become a more user-friendly organisations for all our constituents.

I am not saying that change for change's sake would be helpful or that the civil service's traditions and culture should be dropped or changed tomorrow. Nothing could be further from the truth. Much in our civil service is excellent and world-beating, and those aspects must be retained, built on and developed. Even some of the civil service's quainter, more charming or even idiosyncratic methods have their place and their great strengths. Change should be embraced only when it is absolutely clear that that change will deliver real and worthwhile benefits—particularly to the public.

I congratulate hon. Members on the very high quality of this debate. I congratulate all those who work in the civil service—those at the coal face and those in the top brass—on the high quality of their work. I have spoken a little about communication. The essence of good communication is, of course, listening—so I will now sit down and listen.

6.27 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): The debate has rightly ranged widely across many developments in the civil service, including those in the senior civil service and in relation to the new code, which came into effect earlier this year. I agree with the First Division Association—with which I am proud to have had an association in the past—that it is a useful step in the right direction. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), however, I agree that the code would be better if it were placed on a statutory basis. It should have a statutory footing, as should a freedom of information Act, to which we are also—quite rightly—committed.

Not surprisingly, the debate has focused on the latest examples of the Government's privatisation lust, especially on the privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services—or RAS—an organisation more appropriately christened in happier times for the civil

[Mr. Peter Mandelson]

service. We should judge whether this and similar measures have any merit by reference to three questions: will they make the civil service more efficient, will they do anything to restore the battered morale of the civil service, and will they make Government policy failures any less likely in future? The answer to all those questions is, with the common consent of everyone with any experience of the civil service, a resounding no.

Nowhere is that more obvious than over the proposed privatisation of RAS, which touches on one of the core pillars around which the civil service was created, namely the recruitment of politically neutral and impartial officials in whom the public and Parliament can have complete confidence. I make no apology for focusing on that matter this evening.

Recruitment is basic to the whole standing and performance of the public service, but barely any attempt has been made to justify the privatisation in terms of its usefulness to the civil service or the public. What benefit could there be to the civil service of a big private sector headhunter taking over its recruitment?

The private sector headhunter will have no background, practice or expertise in the work of the civil service and the qualities that one looks for in senior civil servants—indeed, in all civil servants—are different from those in the private sector. That is not an adverse comment on the private sector; it is simply an observation of fact. Of course, management skills are increasingly important in the public service—I readily acknowledge that—but, at senior levels of the public service, the motivation is different from that in the private sector. Great value is attached to intellectual integrity and the ability to weigh both sides of an argument as well as to work in a collective and non-competitive atmosphere. Working in the private sector, on the other hand, is different from what is involved in working with Ministers—and some would say that that is a very good thing, too.

What benefit is there to the civil service in RAS, or any other agencies for that matter, being able to extend their operation to wider commercial markets? There might be something in it for the private sector individuals involved in that it will enable their favourite private sector clients to pick the best public sector talent thanks to their access to RAS records. However, it is a monumental irrelevance to the operation and effectiveness of the civil service. I believe that it is potentially damaging, too, as I shall argue.

Why, then, are the Government proceeding with this privatisation? I offer three reasons: because it is there; because the Deputy Prime Minister feels like it; and because the Government want to notch up further scalps. *[Interruption.]* That may be good enough for the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), but it is not good enough for the civil service or the public.

Let us be clear that this privatisation will not provide any better services to the public. It will not put another policeman on the beat, create another hospital bed or put a one extra qualified teacher into the nation's schools. It is little wonder that the proposal has not a scintilla of public support. By all accounts, even the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is remarkably unenthusiastic about the measure, despite his attempt at flag waving in support of it this afternoon. We have to understand how the decision to privatise RAS was taken in order to understand his lack of enthusiasm.

I believe that it was the Chancellor of the Duchy who said in December 1995 that he had appointed Coopers and Lybrand merely to "study" the options for the agency. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his departmental underling at the time, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), announced that it would be privatised as soon as possible in 1996 via a private sale. That was certainly an embarrassing rebuff for the Chancellor.

As hon. Members have remarked, the arguments in favour of the privatisation are at best specious and at worst non-existent. They simply serve to extend the Government's time-honoured, worn-out dogmatic belief that everything public is bad, everything private is good and that public services become good only when they have been privatised.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman favour us with a list of privatisations that a future Labour Government, were we unfortunate enough to have one, would reverse?

Mr. Mandelson: If this was a debate about all privatisations I might do so, but it is a debate about a specific privatisation against which I am arguing.

What of the putative safeguards for the civil service following privatisation, which were advanced rather weakly by the Chancellor this afternoon? We were told that the actual selection of recruits would continue to be in civil service hands. That might be so ultimately and technically, but what about the prior stages of processing and testing? How would the principles of selection by merit and fair and open competition be safeguarded once the agency had passed into private hands? Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service can tell us that.

Apparently, civil servants will continue to have only an indirect involvement in—not control of—the preparation of some but not all exercises to ensure that they are a true "reflection" of civil service work. However, there will be no central co-ordination, no protection of confidentiality, no leak proofing or other security.

What about enforcement of private sector contracts if the measure goes ahead? The answer is that Departments will "monitor" the contracts as they go along. In the background, we gather, is the notion that the performance of the private owner will be subject to—wait for it—periodic audit. Will there be an ultimate sanction if contracts go wrong? Apparently, the simple desire to win future contracts will be a powerful encouragement to perform well. I hardly think so. All in all, the Government's idea of enforcement amounts to little more than a small feather duster to keep the private owners in line unless, of course, the threat to cancel a contract altogether is carried out. No one, however, has a suggestion as to what the civil service and its fast-track recruitment would do then—presumably it would hand out leaflets in the street.

As so many senior and experienced Members of the other place argued in a debate in March, the whole exercise is completely contemptible but, tragically, it is quite in keeping with the present Administration's destructive attitude to the civil service.

No one who comes into contact with civil servants could fail to admire their professionalism, tenacity and commitment to the job. I have to tell the hon. Member for Harrow, West that we are not criticising members of the public service when we attack what is happening inside the Government machine—we are criticising members of the Government who are responsible for inflicting such wanton damage on the civil service.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: That is not good enough. The hon. Gentleman must reread in *Hansard* the previous speeches that he made from the Front and Back Benches in which he specifically accused civil servants of acting improperly, not by name but in general terms. He is not attacking the Government by doing that, as he seems to believe: he is attacking civil servants who cannot answer back.

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. I have never said that civil servants act improperly. I have, however, suggested that Ministers are guilty of enticing and encouraging them to act improperly, which is quite different. Conservative Members may rejoice in their temporary colonisation of the civil service, but it is bad for Government when Ministers seek to reduce the public service to a rump, there only to reflect the Government's political prejudices. When that is allied to asking civil servants to distort or suppress information or statistics that are inconvenient to Ministers or to accept the blame when things go wrong because Ministers will not take responsibility for their failures—one thinks of the prison service, the Scott report or the Child Support Agency—a bleak picture emerges of eroding standards and morale in the civil service.

It is not surprising that many civil servants feel undervalued and undermined. For that reason, we should not be debating changes to the recruitment agency today. We need urgent action to restore a public service whose problem is not recruiting good members, but losing them once they have joined and become thoroughly disillusioned.

If we were to go outside the Chamber and engage a passer-by in conversation, we would find much that would interest him or her about our debate today. People are understandably and properly concerned about the state of our public services and about what is being done in their name. They are concerned about the quality and ethical standards of those employed by their taxes to act in their name and to deliver their services.

The inadequacy of many public services on which our people and their families depend, the lingering mistrust of officialdom, the notion that people have little say over the powers that be, and even perhaps a general awareness that the traditional standards seem to be under threat are all of great concern to the people whom we represent, and we should have focused our debate on those concerns this evening. But the last thing on their minds—in fact, I cannot see that such a thing would ever cross their minds—would be the idea that any of their practical concerns might be addressed by the privatisation of the civil service Recruitment and Assessment Services, the Occupational Health Service Agency or Horticultural Research International, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred.

Those are the obsessions of a Government who can think of doing nothing more for the quality of our public services and for the standards, performance and morale of civil servants than to pursue these tawdry and mean-spirited privatisation measures simply to satisfy their own lust. That is the message that we must take from the debate. The Government, in attempting to prove that they have not run out of steam, are presenting us today with the political equivalent of a campfire kettle, brewing up a thin and tasteless brew that no one wants to drink. That is why their pathetic measures should be rejected and why we should ask the Public Service Select Committee, as our amendment states,

"to conduct a thorough independent review of all recent Civil Service reforms"

so that we can achieve the public service that we deserve and need. I invite the House to vote for that tonight.

6.44 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): I begin by assuring the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) that our reforms are not motivated by lust. Many arguments are made about the motives for our reforms, but I have never previously been accused of being motivated by lust when it comes to public-sector reform.

The debate has focused on an issue—the ethics of the civil service—raised by the right hon. Members for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the Chairman of the Select Committee who, I understand, cannot be here for the winding-up speeches. If the Government were in any way guilty of politicising the civil service, it would be inconceivable that we would have produced the codes, the guidance and the independent arrangements for the civil service commissioners that we have introduced in the past five years.

When I was serving as a civil servant, we had nothing like the code of conduct that is now issued to every civil servant. The code makes clear the ethical basis on which civil servants are expected to operate and sets out more clearly than ever what a civil servant can do if he is in any way unhappy with his circumstances. We have produced so much guidance and so many codes of conduct, and so much has been brought out into the open that was not available before, that we recently produced guidance on guidance. I cannot understand why the Opposition believe that somehow we need even more published guidance and codes of conduct. That is exactly what the Government have been doing in the past five years. We have brought a new transparency to the monitoring of public services of a quality that did not exist before.

Mr. Garrett: No Opposition Member has argued for more guidance, publications or codes of practice. We asked for an enforceable system, established by statute.

Mr. Willetts: The civil service code states that if a civil servant believes that the response that he has received to a complaint

"does not represent a reasonable response to the grounds of his or her concern, he or she may report the matter in writing to the civil service commissioners."

[Mr. Willetts]

The role of the commissioners, who are now responsible for hearing and determining appeals under the new code, is close to a statutory right.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) asked about training in the civil service, and delivered a speech that I am sure he has been giving ever since he served as an adviser on the Fulton report all those years ago. The hon. Gentleman has only to wait a couple of months for the training and development White Paper that will set out an ambitious programme of reform of civil service training and will set out how the Government's objectives of achieving investment in people and standards across the civil service will also raise the level of skills, particularly in the areas that he has been calling for all these years, such as science and technology. We will ensure that there is more use of relevant qualifications in the civil service, such as national vocational qualifications, accountancy or personnel qualifications. We will ensure that the civil service is better qualified in those technical areas to which he drew attention. That is an area that the White Paper in July will address.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I apologise for having missed most of the debate, but this is an important issue. When I was in Her Majesty's services, I had to sign the Official Secrets Act. If one had confidential or secret information, it was more than one's life was worth to give that information to people who were not entitled to it. Increasingly these days, there are leaks from the civil service, and these are often politically motivated. Will the Government introduce a proper code of conduct so that any civil servant who rats in this way loses his job and his pension rights and is sent out without any ceremony?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) also raised that subject in his speech. My hon. Friend is quite right that leaking confidential information has no role in the modern civil service, as the hon. Member for Hartlepool made clear in a recent speech outside this place. He disappointed some of his supporters by making it clear that he thought it important to maintain the confidentiality of the relationship between civil servants and Ministers.

Mr. Derek Foster: If the Minister wants to take action against civil servants who leak, what does he intend to do about Ministers who leak, as they do that all the time? What does he propose to do about Prime Ministers who leak? Reference has been made to the Westland crisis, when the previous Prime Minister tried to pin the blame on one of her colleagues. What will be done about the big boys who leak, rather than the little minnows?

Mr. Willetts: I am not sure that Ministers leak. Indeed, I should have thought that that was almost impossible by definition since Ministers explain what the Government's policies are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) asked about ethnic minority staff. We have a good record in that regard. The proportion in 1989 was 4.2 per cent.; in 1995—the most recent year for which we have reliable figures—it had risen to 5.4 per cent., compared with 4.9 per cent. overall in the economically active population.

Mr. Garrett: What about the top grades?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman is right to ask that. We are not doing as well as we would like in relation to the top grades, but even in those grades there has been an improvement. At senior levels, ethnic minority representation has increased from 1.5 per cent. in 1989 to 2.5 per cent. now.

A series of questions were asked about public sector research establishments. On behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I apologise again to any hon. Members who did not receive written answers that should have been issued at 3.30 pm. We are conducting prior options reviews of those establishments. On some—such as Horticultural Research International, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman)—no final decisions have yet been reached. As for others, notably the 12 for which the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible, the DTI announced the conclusions of the reviews today.

The policy intentions announced today will now be subject to detailed planning for implementation, and the manpower consequences will form part of that process. No targets have been set for reducing numbers; the reviews are about getting better value for money and more effective research output. A range of options will be examined in the other research establishments that are still being reviewed: anything from privatisation to contractorisation, rationalisation and, indeed, no change. Any potential redundancies will, of course, be taken into account when the options are considered.

In his opening remarks, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said that we should look forward with bated breath to the speech of the hon. Member for Hartlepool, which would constitute a powerful attack on our proposals for Recruitment and Assessment Services. I kept waiting for that powerful attack, but I do not think that it ever came. We were told nothing that we had not heard time and again in relation to every previous privatisation introduced by the Government. We were confronted by a lurid picture of the private sector, a complete inability to understand the power of legal contracts to enforce standards and, I am afraid, a good many irrational and indefensible claims about—in effect—the inability of the civil service commissioners to monitor standards.

It is the civil service commissioners, quite independently of the civil service, who will audit arrangements when RAS is privatised. None of their auditing powers will be in any way weakened by privatisation. In fact, we shall introduce specific arrangements to ensure the integrity and quality of the fast-stream recruitment process. Civil servants' roles as assessors for the civil service selection board and the final selection board will be unchanged. We shall ensure that selection decisions on candidates remain with civil servants. The tests applied by RAS will continue to be owned by Government and licensed to the privatised organisation, and our Department—the Office of Public Service—will have a strengthened role as a customer in monitoring the fast-stream contract on behalf of customer Departments.

With those safeguards, the civil service fast-stream development programme will be operated under contract to the new company. The privatised RAS will be able to expand into new markets and capitalise on its expertise. Yet again, we have heard the extraordinary myth that somehow RAS could remain within the public sector and enjoy what is described as full commercial freedom. That is simply impossible. It is unimaginable that private sector recruitment consultants could compete with public sector recruitment organisations, and that public sector bodies would not be obliged to pay tax—that their liabilities would ultimately be protected by the taxpayer. That is not plausible; it is not fair competition. We have repeatedly tried to explain to the Opposition that if there is to be fair competition, and if such bodies are to operate with commercial freedom, there is only one way to achieve that—through genuine privatisation. There is no alternative.

Mr. Gunnell: When will the Minister give the written details that he promised in a written answer on 29 January at column *489*? Is he willing to release to us, or place in the Library, the information that was sent to those who expressed an interest in the purchase of RAS when it was advertised in the *Financial Times*? When will the final details of the privatisation be released?

Mr. Willetts: I hope that that information—apart from some that may be commercially confidential—will be released very shortly. We are working as rapidly as we can.

Let me turn to what may be the Opposition's agenda. According to the amendment, they believe that the civil service is suffering from initiative fatigue. I can only say that, following the Opposition Front Bench speeches, the fatigue from which we are suffering is review fatigue, careful consideration fatigue and calm reflection fatigue, because that is all that the Opposition have to offer.

Mr. Garrett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I must make some progress in the remaining few minutes.

We produced a White Paper on the civil service, which was then carefully considered by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, as it then was. The Committee produced a very valuable report. We published a further White Paper explaining our proposals in depth and responding to what the Committee had said. On that basis, we are making progress in modernising the civil service. That includes using the opportunities offered by competitive tendering and privatisation whenever they present themselves.

The Labour party does not seem to understand that, in the words of the Select Committee,

"the quest for greater effectiveness and efficiency in the Civil Service should be an unending one".

The Committee wished to

"stress that the requirement to maximise the return from finite resources will not go away."

I detected, buried in the speech of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, another Labour spending pledge. The right hon. Gentleman says that he wants to stop the "Competing for Quality" programme, which generates extra public expenditure savings of £200 million per year. We are subjecting £1 billion worth of public service work to careful study on that programme every year; as a result, we make savings of 20 per cent. on average. If the right hon. Gentleman is not prepared to continue the programme, he must explain to the House how he will finance the higher running costs that will arise from his loss of nerve.

In the absence of any clear statement from Labour today about its possible policies on the civil service, I turned to "The Blair Revolution"—subtitled "Can New Labour Deliver?"—by the hon. Member for Hartlepool. The hon. Gentleman need not blush. In the book, I found quite a good account of the philosophy behind some of the Government's reforms. The hon. Gentleman states:

"There is no reason, in principle, why the operational arms of Whitehall should not continue to be separated from the policy arms, leaving ministers more free to concentrate on politics and strategy."

That is an important distinction which Ministers have frequently made, often being greeted by scepticism from the Opposition parties.

The hon. Gentleman said a little about politicisation. I did not quite recognise his anxieties on that score. He says in his book:

"There is need . . . for a stronger political presence in No. 10, providing political advice and contacts"—

I wonder who is being described.

Mr. Beith: He means himself.

Mr. Willetts: The right hon. Gentleman may be right. The sentence continues:

"which neither the private office nor the Cabinet Office can do because they are not supposed to get involved . . . and cannot meet the Prime Minister's central need: to focus on and manage the government's political strategy and programme."

One final quotation may tell us something about the position in which the hon. Member for Hartlepool finds himself. He wrote:

"Sometimes, if you have a difficult and uncompromising job to do . . . it is difficult to avoid being hated as well as feared by those around you. But seeing things through . . . that is, getting your own way—requires more than exercising fear or having the last word in the media: it requires taking people on in argument."

To do that, one has to be talking to them. It is very difficult if one is not.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 134, Noes 209.

Division No. 131] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Byers, Stephen
Allen, Graham	Cabom, Richard
Armstrong, Hilary	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Barron, Kevin	Cann, Jamie
Battle, John	Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Bayley, Hugh	Church, Judith
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret	Clapham, Michael
Beith, Rt Hon A J	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Benton, Joe	Connarty, Michael
Bermingham, Gerald	Corbett, Robin
Berry, Roger	Cousins, Jim
Betts, Clive	Cummings, John
Blunkett, David	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Boateng, Paul	Davidson, Ian

Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Etherington, Bill
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McCartney, Ian
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Malcolm Chisholm.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mills, Iain
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*

Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's policies on the Civil Service, as set out in the White Papers 'Continuity and Change' and 'Taking Forward Continuity and Change', including the promulgation of the Civil Service Code from 1st January 1996, the establishment of the Senior Civil Service from 1st April 1996 and the strengthening of the role of the Civil Service Commissioners in maintaining the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit in recruitment; also welcomes the Government's policy with regard to the privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services, with the proposed safeguards to protect the quality of Civil Service recruitment; and looks forward to the intended publication in July of a White Paper on training and development in the Civil Service, associated with the further development by the Civil Service College of a number of partnerships with the private sector which will enhance its status in the provision of courses for those working in the public and private sector.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May we have an urgent statement from a Foreign Office Minister, so that the House can express its revulsion and anger at the pernicious and disloyal way in which Commissioner Kinnock is trying to undermine the policy of the British Government on overturning the beef ban?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Gentleman may ask, but he knows that it is not within the power of the Chair to call for such a statement. Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard his request.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Value Added Tax

That the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1196), dated 30th April 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st May, be approved.

Northern Ireland

That the draft Food Safety (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

Social Security

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 28th March, be approved.

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support (General) (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 9th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to deregulation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

Industrial and Provident Societies

That the draft Deregulation (Industrial and Provident Societies) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 22nd April, be approved.

Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities

That the draft Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 22nd April, be approved.

Private Companies

That the draft Deregulation (Resolutions of Private Companies) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 25th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Council Tax

7.13 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): I beg to move,

That the draft Council Tax Limitation (England) (Maximum Amounts) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 20th May, be approved.

In reaching my decisions on total standard spending for England and the capping principles, I looked hard both at the pressures on local spending and at the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness in authorities. Individual authorities must be equally thorough. They should always be seeking ways to deliver better value for money to their local taxpayers. That means taking a rigorous approach to pay and efficiency and making a realistic assessment of their spending priorities.

The House will recall that the total standard spending for England for 1996-97 is £44.93 billion, an increase of 3.3 per cent. over the 1995-96 figure. That was a substantial increase and it reflected the importance that the Government attach to education and the care of the vulnerable and elderly. We provided for a 4.5 per cent. increase in provision for education and 6.9 per cent. for social services, including further transitional community care special grant.

It is, of course, for each local authority to set its budget and decide its spending priorities. My capping principles for 1996-97 were devised to give authorities the flexibility to make use of the additional resources that we provided for education, social services, fire and police in the settlement. We did that by ensuring that an authority's permitted increase under the capping rules was at least as big as the total of the increases in those blocks of the authority's standard spending assessment. We called that passporting. I am therefore more than a little surprised, given the demands last year for additional funding for education, that some local education authorities have chosen not to pass on the 4.5 per cent. increase in education standard spending to schools. I am especially sad that my county council has failed to do that, but has used the money elsewhere and thus denied schools the money that they should have had.

For county councils and shire unitary authorities, the permitted increase was at least 3 per cent.; for metropolitan districts, outer London boroughs and metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities, it was at least 2 per cent.; for inner London boroughs, 1.5 per cent.; and for police authorities, 3.5 per cent. Shire district councils were able to increase budgets by 0.5 per cent. Authorities that budgeted more than 12.5 per cent. above standard spending assessment would be subject to a cash freeze. Capping always allows an authority to spend at the level of its SSA.

Most local authorities have set affordable budgets and council taxes this year within their capping limits. That meant that when I confirmed my capping principles on 3 April, I was able to propose cap limits that required only two authorities—Cambridgeshire county council and Oxfordshire county council—to reduce their budget requirements. By contrast, my initial cap limits last year would have required nine authorities to reduce their budgets.

In a moment I shall set out my final decisions on Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire, which are the subject of this order. Before I do so, I should deal briefly with the four other authorities that I formally designated under my capping rules on 3 April—Essex county council and Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear and Merseyside fire and civil defence authorities.

In the cases of Essex county council, Greater Manchester fire and civil defence authority and Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority, designation was purely technical. I had agreed in advance with them that they could set budgets above their caps by specified amounts. They are not required to reduce their budgets or to incur any additional costs, and the process is already complete.

Merseyside fire and civil defence authority set a budget requirement for 1996-97 of £52.78 million. The authority argued that a lower budget would lead to its being in breach of statutory minimum standards for the fire service. That view was backed up by Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate. I therefore designated Merseyside fire authority at its original budget. As with the other three authorities, it does not need to make any further budget reductions this year and the capping process for it is now complete.

Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire were the only local education authorities seriously to exceed the provisional cap indicated by my capping rules. That was in spite of permitted increases of 3.7 per cent. for Cambridgeshire and 3 per cent. for Oxfordshire—both of which were greater than the average LEA permitted increase of 2.9 per cent. I designated both counties for capping on 3 April and set maximum amounts for them at the level indicated by the capping rules. Both counties challenged those caps and have argued that they should be allowed to confirm the higher budgets that they have set.

In reaching a view on the final capping limit for those authorities, I must take account of the specific local circumstances of each authority. I have, therefore, considered each county's case carefully, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has met delegations from each authority to hear its case in detail.

Cambridgeshire's problems stem, in its view, from the fact that it used up all its available reserves last year. However, Cambridgeshire would have been aware last year that its reserves could be used only once and should have budgeted accordingly. It would not be right for us to allow authorities to top up their reserves every time they ran out, not least because the local taxpayer would foot the bill.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: If I may finish the next paragraph, I am sure that the hon. Lady will find it helpful.

In fact, Cambridgeshire's total reserves stand at £53.8 million—about 13 per cent. of its proposed net revenue expenditure. It admits that some of its reserves are available to support revenue spending this year. It also admits that a budget at cap is achievable as it has not yet passed on the additional resources to the relevant services. Against that background, I believe that there should be no relaxation in Cambridgeshire's proposed cap, and that the cap is reasonable, achievable and appropriate in all the circumstances of the authority. If the draft order is agreed

by the House, it will result in a reduction of council tax in Cambridgeshire of £25.26 for a two-adult band D household.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the Secretary of State accept that, in the view of the district auditor, Cambridgeshire's reserves are now down to six days' spending, not the amounts that the Secretary of State just announced? Does he accept that Cambridgeshire's reason for spending reserves in such quantities last year was that the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration promised that the area cost adjustment was being closely scrutinised and said that Cambridgeshire might well expect something from that in this financial year?

Mr. Gummer: That is nonsense; the last point was absolutely untrue. We are considering the area cost adjustments and we have said that an independent inquiry is being held, which will report to allow us to make changes, if we think that right, in future years, but I am quite sure—I need not even ask him—that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration never gave any such indication, because it was impossible for any such indication to be given. One does not know, until the thing is properly examined, what, if any, effect there might be. I also represent part of a county that is affected in a deleterious way. Last time we considered the matter, we found that it was much more difficult than I had expected and there were very good grounds for supporting the present system. We are assessing it again, and we are trying to do it as independently as possible, but I am quite sure that my hon. Friend did not say anything of the sort.

Sir Anthony Grant (South–West Cambridgeshire): No one has been a bigger opponent of the area cost adjustment than I have for at least 10 years. I have mentioned it repeatedly in the House. I have tackled umpteen Ministers—the last one was my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, who was very reasonable in listening to the case put, but certainly never gave any assurance other than that the matter would be very carefully reviewed. There is no delusion about this matter.

Mr. Gummer: I believe that my hon. Friend will agree, first, that the reason for the further investigation into this matter is precisely as he puts it—because he and other of my right hon. and hon. Friends have pressed for it. I am considering the matter independently and as carefully as I possibly can. I think that my hon. Friend will also agree that for a local authority to decide that it will fix its spending arrangements on the basis of a hope that something might turn up in the following year seems to betoken—

Sir Anthony Grant: Micawberism.

Mr. Gummer: I should not like to go as far as that, but the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) does the Liberal and Labour parties that run Cambridgeshire county council no favours by suggesting that the reason why they got this wrong was that they hoped that some money might turn up. If we all ran our private finances on that basis, we would suffer from serious problems. I hope that the hon. Member for Cambridge does not run her finances in that way, or she will find herself in difficulties and need counselling, which clearly, in her terms, Cambridgeshire does.

Cambridgeshire had significant extra resources, and those resources could be applied, and have been applied, in such a way as to allow it to keep to a budget below cap. That is what it has done, and I do not think that the authority would criticise the figure that I quoted.

Oxfordshire argues that, since 1991-92, it has reduced total spending by £45 million and that scope for further savings is severely limited. It also argues that, even at its proposed level, the budget represents £5.5 million less than the sum that would be required to keep services running at the same level as in 1995-96.

Nevertheless, on balance, I do not consider Oxfordshire's position to be sufficiently different from other LEAs to justify a relaxation in its capping limit. All the other counties limited to a 3 per cent. permitted increase have managed to set budgets within their provisional cap. The same is true of the inner and outer London LEAs, which were limited to 1.5 per cent. and 2 per cent. increases respectively. Although Oxfordshire's reserves are not large, they are by no means the lowest, as a percentage of budget requirement, among the counties.

I therefore propose that there should be no relaxation in Oxfordshire's original cap, which I consider to be reasonable, appropriate and achievable in all the circumstances of the authority. If the draft order is agreed by the House, it will result in a reduction of council tax in Oxfordshire of £34.90 for a two-adult band D household.

Before I conclude, I remind the House that ordinary people pay these bills. It is all very well talking about this or that standard of service or this and that demand, but ordinary people have to pay the bills, and £34.90 is a sum of importance, not something that must be cast aside.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I had not intended to intervene at this point, but as the Secretary of State has not referred to it, I should like him to confirm for the record that he has written to Oxfordshire, offering an extra borrowing facility in recognition of the county's difficulties. As he appeared to dismiss those difficulties, will he explain why he is offering the borrowing facility and give an idea of how much it might be?

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Gentleman had waited, I was going to cover that in my next comment. I think it important to point out, however, that there is no basic difficulty.

Oxfordshire could do what we have asked it to do, and other counties in more straitened circumstances, in the sense that they have had only a 1.5 per cent. or 2 per cent. increase, have managed to solve their problems, but there is a specific short-term problem, which might mean that Oxfordshire would have to make teachers redundant this year, only to have to employ them again in a year or two's time. That is a result of specific problems in the Oxfordshire profile.

Precisely because that is likely to be a short-term problem, a relaxation in the cap would not be the right approach, as that would give Oxfordshire a permanent increase in its spending power, which could be done only at the behest of other counties. It would put Oxfordshire out of line with other counties.

[Mr. Gummer]

I am therefore prepared to offer Oxfordshire a supplementary credit approval and a capitalisation direction, which will enable it to capitalise revenue expenditure, to help with its short-term problems. That will, in effect, give the authority another year to get its budget into line with our assessment of an appropriate level of expenditure. I understand that Oxfordshire will make a proposal for an SCA and a capitalisation direction, and I await that proposal.

If the order is approved, we shall serve a statutory notice on both authorities formally setting their cap. They will have 21 days to reduce their budget in line with their cap and set new lower council taxes. In Oxfordshire's case, the reduction can, to some extent, be offset by using the offer of a capitalisation direction and SCA to free up resources. Those resources can then be used to support its existing spending plans. I am sure that hon. Members would expect it to do that to support its education spending plans, for which it has been given the money.

I have considered carefully the points raised by all the authorities involved in the capping process, to ensure that the caps that I have proposed are reasonable, appropriate and achievable. Where there are special circumstances, I have been prepared to make concessions. The final outcome is a reduction of £13 million in this year's council taxes in the affected areas. I commend the order to the House.

7.29 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): This is the first time that this debate has been held since I have been a member of the environment team. I read with interest what was said in previous years. I have also reflected on the recent comments of the Secretary of State, on the methodology that he has used and on the ways in which he has approached these issues. Once again, I have found that the words used one year are not followed up in succeeding years—and I shall come back to that.

The Labour party has been consistent in the belief that the formulations of the standard spending assessment retain problems. Every time that this is raised, the Secretary of State tells me that it is nonsense and that I have said that it cannot be adjusted quickly. I have said that: it needs proper investigation. Grave concern has been expressed throughout the country about the unfair way in which standard spending assessments are calculated. I will not go through the figures on Westminster tonight. Ministers will not let me have the calculations that they say show that our protestations are wrong. I want to know how the Government calculated the difference between now and 1979, as no one else has been able to do so.

Given the rigidity of the actions of Ministers and the Government tonight, the unfairness and unhappiness throughout the country—apart from Westminster—about the formula used to calculate the standard spending assessment means that we have to return to it. If the Government were interested in working to the agenda of people outside the House, they would be pushing much harder. Last year, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen) said:

"I hope that hon. Members will reflect upon the fact that we cannot return to this situation year after year because it will worsen year after year. We must now begin to think of a more flexible and acceptable arrangement."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 921.]

I could not agree more. However, this year the Government have not been flexible, nor have they attempted to address the individual needs of the councils involved. It is significant that today the Secretary of State made a substantially shorter speech than he did last year—although the beginning of his speech was almost the same as his speech last year. He seems to have learnt nothing from last year and he has not defended his actions.

I think that the Secretary of State knows that he is using draconian powers that go far beyond commitments that were made when the system was established and during the passage of the legislation that gave the Government the powers. At that time, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), made commitments and said that this would be used only as a reserve measure. He said:

"It is not a measure to be used as a matter of course.

The people of an area certainly will be able to vote for a relatively high-spending authority if they so choose.

It is important that there should be such a reserve power—rarely, if ever used we hope—to protect the charge payers of an area against extreme cases of extravagant and irresponsible local authorities."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1988; Vol. 132, c. 51.]

The Government have wandered far and wide from that commitment and it is not being upheld in the order that we are considering tonight.

It is clear that neither of the authorities that we are debating is charged with extreme cases of extravagant and irresponsible spending—those charges have not been upheld by the external audits of the authorities. This goes way beyond what the Government committed themselves to do when they introduced the power.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Lady comment on why the Labour and Liberal Democrat group leaders on Cambridgeshire county council wrote to their counterparts on other English county councils almost three months before the settlement was announced saying that they could envisage a number of authorities contemplating exceeding capping levels, that they would prefer not to be isolated and that they would feel more secure if more councils exceeded the cap on a common basis. Cambridgeshire was contemplating breaking the cap before the money was shared out. That was its intention, regardless of the amount of money that it received.

Ms Armstrong: That is not a point in relation to what I was saying.

Mr. Simon Burns (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): Answer it.

Ms Armstrong: I will answer it if I am given the opportunity and the normal courtesies of the House are observed. We have a problematic Whip; he is obviously feeling a little insecure.

The question whether the authorities are irresponsible depends on how they prepared their budget. It would be irresponsible if an authority simply sought to determine its budget and priorities after the Government had pronounced. Councils have a responsibility to their area and to work effectively throughout the year. They have to set the priorities and work out what their electors want them to do.

I have discussed this with both councils and I know that they started their process early. They identified the priorities and what their schools and social services provision would require. They discussed this with people in their counties long before the Government set their rate. If they did not start to do that until after the Government had set their rate, they would be failing in their responsibility to their electorate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): Answer the question.

Ms Armstrong: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman thinks that this is not an answer. The Secretary of State complained that the council wrote to other authorities before he set the cap. It was not intent on breaking the cap; it was intent on responding to local demands and to local priorities for spending, knowing what the Government were likely to do. I contend that if they were not working responsibly with their local electorate, the Secretary of State would be right to condemn them. However, they were working responsibly with their local electorate—and I might have something to say to the right hon. Gentleman later about some of his contentions about the authority.

Mr. Gummer: Is the hon. Lady saying that she would commend local authorities that decide that they will think seriously about breaking the cap even before they know how much money they will get? Is the Labour party committed to urging authorities to break the cap even before they know how much money they will receive? If so, that is entirely new Labour policy, which we will be pleased to broadcast.

Ms Armstrong: The Secretary of State is being irresponsible once again: that is his problem. He knows that I did not say that. He is trying to make accusations against those authorities because his argument is without substance. He has shown that he is not concerned about the fact that the authorities have met their statutory responsibilities in service delivery. He is not concerned that they spend less than the average amount per head of population compared with other counties. He is not concerned that the district auditor has commended them for their quality of spending control and for the efficiency of their spending. The Secretary of State simply arrived at a global sum and those authorities have become victims of the global picture. He has not paid attention to local needs. It is the right hon. Gentleman, and not the authorities, who is acting irresponsibly.

Sir Anthony Grant: The hon. Lady should note that Cambridgeshire was found wanting in a more recent auditor's report. It is well below average on two counts: care of the elderly and primary education.

Ms Armstrong: I shall refer to performance indicators later. That is a different matter: it is not so much about the efficiency of the authority as the quality of service delivery. *[Interruption.]* I wish that Conservative Members would take the matter more seriously; it will affect people's lives.

The Secretary of State said that it is important to approve the order because ordinary people are paying the bills. That is true, but they are also receiving the services. Ordinary people in Cambridgeshire and in Oxfordshire have been consulted extensively about the amounts that they want to be spent on schools. The Government are trying to con local people about the available expenditure, but the people have seen through them. The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) wrote a letter to head teachers, one of whom sent a copy to me.

The people of Cambridgeshire know that, if the capping order succeeds, available expenditure will increase by 1.9 per cent. over last year. In Oxfordshire, there will be a 2.7 per cent. real increase in available expenditure for schools over and above last year. The amount that the Government announced that local authorities may spend is a phantom figure. Local people have recognised that fact and they have decided that the order does not meet their needs.

The previous Secretary of State said that people could vote for a high-spending authority. There were no county council elections last year, but there were district council elections. The challenge to the cap was an issue in the election campaigns in both district authority areas. The matter was discussed. I was staggered when Banbury, which is in the district of Cherwell, elected a Labour council. Labour won more seats in that area than we believed possible—let alone targeted and expected to win. That shows how the people of Oxfordshire are voting. Labour also did exceptionally well in Cambridgeshire.

Turning to issues of quality and efficiency, Oxfordshire comes 45th out of 47 counties for total expenditure per head. It spends £560 per head. Cambridgeshire ranks a little higher—it is 37 out of 47—and allocates £580 per head. The county average is £629. Performance indicators identified in the recent Audit Commission report show that both authorities are above average and are doing reasonably well. The performance indicators include education, the collection of charges and so on. The authorities are working hard to meet the Government's objectives, regardless of their political persuasion. Referring to Cambridgeshire, the district auditor said:

"The Council's financial affairs continue to be well controlled. However, the Council now faces significant financial pressures".

The district auditor is concerned that Cambridgeshire's good housekeeping is being threatened by financial pressures. We are told that Oxfordshire is also a good authority that is at the forefront of voluntary competitive tendering initiatives. The district auditor said that its tendering process is operated in the interests of council tax payers and that contracts are awarded to the lowest bidder. Oxfordshire is commended by the district auditor for its low staffing and its high standards, among other things.

We are not debating profligate authorities that have upset local people with their overspending. Both authorities suffer as a result of rapidly growing populations. That is a particular problem in Cambridgeshire, but the order does not take account of that fact. In Oxfordshire, there are more children aged one to four than is the average for that population profile and the number of 60 to 80-year-olds is also above average. That puts pressure on the two areas of service provision that are the most demanding financially.

The Government are so obsessed with ideological dogma that they are breaking their commitments on spending and on capping. They have demonstrated that, far from being in control of local government finance,

[Ms Armstrong]

they have lost sight of reason. The Government are acting against the wishes of the people of Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The people want the opportunity to fund their schools and their social services properly, but they know that the Government will manipulate the figures to ensure that they cannot do that. That is not good enough. We need the flexibility that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire urged on Ministers last year. Once again, the Government have not learnt their lesson and the electorate will ensure that it costs them dearly in the very near future.

7.48 pm

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): The arguments heard in Oxfordshire this year are not a bad example of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object. There exists a contradiction that the hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) has done nothing to explain, and which is difficult to explain—how £5.95 million extra for education in Oxfordshire via the standard spending assessment grant is converted into cuts when it reaches schools. At the heart of the matter is substantially more money from the taxpayer to the county, and less money from the county to the schools.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: No.

The county council is trying to argue that Oxfordshire is a special case and that the calculations were in some way unfair to the county—and, the hon. Member for North–West Durham added, to Cambridgeshire. It is suggested that the calculations are the result of some mysterious conspiracy against my county, or of an experiment in ideological dogma. I cannot understand why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should have chosen those two counties for an experiment in ideological dogma which other counties have been spared. The hon. Lady threw no light on that curious proposition. Obviously her claims cannot be true.

The argument that Oxfordshire is a special case dissolves at the touch. The county has not provided the Members of Parliament that represent it the wherewithal for arguing that Oxfordshire is a special case. The arguments leave out of account something that the Government cannot if their criteria are to be real needs—that is, the lower proportion of Oxfordshire children at state schools. Obviously that affects needs and entitlements. Oxfordshire's claim to be a special case is threadbare—and not improved by the absurd threats such as that to close the county museum at Woodstock.

But it is an undeniable fact that the county is not providing or proposing to provide the money needed to run schools and other services. It has been using up reserves to sustain a high rate of spending on education, and it cannot continue to do so. That is no particular credit to the county but is a fact, and one borne in on me and my right hon. and hon. Friends for two years by headmasters, teachers, governors and parents. We have passed on the facts to the two Ministers concerned. The people who talk to us are not playing the political game that the hon. Lady is playing. They are not concerned at how the situation came about. They do not talk about ideological dogma and all that nonsense. They are simply concerned with the facts with which they have to deal, and with the prospects for children and services on the present figures.

Although Oxfordshire does not have a special case, there is a problem—and I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recognised its existence. I hope that the ingenious help that he has decided on for Oxfordshire will ease the immediate strains in the way that he proposes. I ask him to keep a close eye on how the extra money that he will allow to be borrowed beyond the normal limits is spent. I gather that my right hon. Friend will be having discussions with the county council on that point. I trust that he will ensure that the money borrowed is used for the purposes for which it is intended.

Finally, please will my right hon. Friend try—I know this is difficult—to do more to explain the matter to the public? Every now and then he admits us—as he did today—to part of the mysteries over which he presides, but that is not of great help to our constituents. Will his Department produce a one-page leaflet to be included in council tax demands, such as councils usually provide, showing the objective assessments of need? As long as there are mysteries, there will be accusations of foul play and people trying to exploit the matter for ideological and dogmatic reasons. I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks, but may we have a little more light on those dark places?

7.53 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): My hon. Friend the Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) remarked that Cambridgeshire has always been a low-spending authority. It suffered many years of Conservative control, so even Government Members would have difficulty arguing that Cambridgeshire has not been low spending, and that is confirmed by the Audit Commission's report. Of the shire counties, Cambridgeshire is fourth from the bottom in spending on each primary school pupil, 14th from the bottom in spending on secondary school pupils and bottom in spending on the over-16s.

All that is despite the fact that Cambridgeshire has consistently spent 6 per cent. more on education than the Government have allocated in the standard spending assessment. The county's planned budget this year reduces that figure to only 4 per cent. more than the SSA. The people of Cambridgeshire are in no doubt that, if the order is approved, that will result in appalling consequences for the county's education and social services.

The Secretary of State's accusation that Cambridgeshire is not passing on the increase to its schools was perpetrated in a letter of complaint from the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) to the secretary of the National Union of Teachers in Cambridgeshire. The Government say that the county should spend £237 million on education, but it plans to spend £247 million. It is true that £5 million has been reserved. If that hold-back continues, at least 80 teaching posts already identified by schools throughout the county will be lost—on top of the 100 teaching posts that were lost following last year's disastrous cuts.

The Government say that Cambridgeshire should spend £77 million on central services, but the county is planning to spend £84 million. The Government say that the county

should spend £13 million on the fire service, and it is planning to spend more than £14 million. To do so, Cambridgeshire has had to reduce spending on other services by 18 per cent. The county shares the Government's priorities for services and has made sure that money is spent on education, social services and the fire service—not on other services, as it has been accused of doing.

The Government claim that they have given Cambridgeshire £11 million extra this year. In the words of Lord Justice Scott, that is "sophistry". The Government have increased by £11 million not the county's grant, but the standing spending assessment. As the House knows, that is a different matter.

Cambridgeshire was already spending more than the SSA on education, to cope with what the Secretary of State for Education described as a tough settlement last year. The county followed the Government's advice and took £10 million out of its reserves, to lessen the pain of the £17 million cuts imposed. The district auditor has described Cambridgeshire's reserves, which represent only six days' spending, as extremely low. That situation could be repeated this year.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) in his place on the Government Front Bench because he has tried to be helpful. When asked on Radio Cambridgeshire today about the county council's problems, he claimed that it was a profligate authority losing £4 million a year on its school meals service. The £4 million excess of expenditure over income is due to the cost of providing free school meals.

Mr. Paice: It is still too much.

Mrs. Campbell: I suppose that the hon. Gentleman realises that the county council has a statutory duty to supply free school meals to children in need. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that Cambridgeshire should break the law?

The hon. Gentleman has also complained about the high cost of school meals, but that is because Cambridgeshire not only recoups the cost from children who can pay but provides an element of the overheads. That is why the county cannot cut its school meals service without losing money.

Why is Cambridgeshire struggling to pay for services that everyone else expects of right? In April 1995, the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) and I went to see the Minister to ask for a fairer deal for funding for Cambridgeshire. The area cost adjustment, which the county does not receive, would have given Cambridgeshire an additional £15 million last year. I know that the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire was quite optimistic after that meeting. He remarked to the *Cambridge Evening News* that he could see light at the end of the tunnel. The *Cambridge Evening News* is not a paper to sound a note of false optimism, and the editor remarked that it was too early to start celebrating the fact that the Government were finally beginning to see sense.

I am afraid that the news in October dashed our hopes. The Department of the Environment announced an independent review into the area cost adjustment system—a review that would not report until June this year. Promises that Cambridgeshire's situation could be improved were broken, too late for this financial year.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady as I know that her time is limited, but I want to set the record straight.

I said last year that we were looking to see whether there was an approach to labour costs that was more robust than the area cost adjustment. We were looking particularly at travel-to-work areas. I made it clear, as I have always done, that if that turned out to be a better formula, it would be adopted, but that if it did not, it would not be.

I said the same about the present review. At no stage did I say that we would change the system irrespective of whether the methodology was improved. As the hon. Lady will know, the attempt to make the travel-to-work area methodology work was not successful; I was not prepared to adopt a system that I thought was intellectually flawed. That is why we moved to examining a different formulation. I should be grateful if she reported the facts accurately and did not interpret them in a way that is not true.

Mrs. Campbell: I am grateful for that explanation. The hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire and I came away last April with an optimistic view. We certainly understood that something better would be implemented by this time this year—and that was the county's impression too.

When the settlement was announced this year, Ministers and Conservative Members wrote to schools saying that education spending had been increased. That showed a blatant disregard for the truth. I wrote to the right hon. Member for Peterborough to complain about the inaccuracies in the letter that he had sent to schools. He did not bother to answer my allegations; he simply accused me of having an unsavoury reputation for interfering in other people's constituencies. If interfering in other people's constituencies is necessary to bring the truth home to the people of Cambridgeshire, I am prepared to do it any time.

Whom are the Government trying to punish? Are they trying to punish the county council because it is the wrong political colour; or have they decided to punish the people of Cambridgeshire for voting the Conservatives out of office in 1993? Are they so worried about their chances in Cambridge, Peterborough and Fenland in the general election that they decided to cut Cambridgeshire's budget so as to blame the county council? It is not councillors who will suffer: it is the people of Cambridgeshire. Old people in need of care will be subjected to soaring charges, children with special needs will be unable to receive the help that they should have, and children will study in overcrowded classes. There will be fewer curriculum choices, teachers will be overstressed and school governors will face impossible decisions.

Even Peterborough city council recognised this when, at its meeting in January, it noted with concern the county's SSA and capping limit, which limits its discretionary scope. The city council said:

"This council fully supports Cambridgeshire county council in its bid to seek a higher spending limit and to protect as far as possible service standards for priority services, in particular schools, social and fire services."

[Mrs. Campbell]

That was not said by a left-wing council. At the time, the city council was a hung body. That statement, moreover, had the full support of Conservative councillors. Peterborough city council also expressed its heartfelt support for the councillors on Cambridgeshire county council, which was not a Labour council in January. It is now, and one can see why.

The schools have identified 80 redundancies. That has produced outbursts of protest from schools all over the county. I have with me letters from almost all of them protesting about the cuts that they are being forced to make. A head teacher of a school in Huntingdon, the Prime Minister's constituency, was quoted in the *Cambridge Evening News* as saying:

"We are not very far from meltdown. We are getting to the point where there is extreme anxiety whether we can actually keep children in school full time."

Schools are beginning to realise what a disastrous effect the £5.3 million that has been kept back from the schools budget will have on service provision in Cambridgeshire.

I implore the Minister tonight—indeed, I implore Conservative Members—to take pity on the people of Cambridgeshire, to answer their pleas, and to vote with us in the Lobby this evening.

8.4 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): I certainly have sympathy with the people of Cambridgeshire, but my sympathies are with the people who pay the bills—the council tax payers. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) made a valiant attempt to defend Cambridgeshire county council under its current regime. The council certainly needs some defending! She made the council out to be a paragon of financial virtue. As I shall demonstrate, the very opposite is true.

We can at least agree, as I have argued here and elsewhere for ages, that the area cost adjustment is ludicrous and grossly unfair to Cambridgeshire. It is absurd to suppose that taking one step over the border from Bedfordshire into Cambridgeshire takes one suddenly into a poorer area with lower costs. Anyone who shops in Bedford and Cambridge can testify to that. Without the area cost adjustment, a large sum of money would have been available to authorities to spend on education and other services in Cambridgeshire.

As for the review, the Minister of State has been the first Minister to apply careful thought to the matter. The hon. Member for Cambridge and I, together with other representatives of local parties, attended a useful meeting at which we put our case. The Minister promised a review, which means exactly what it says. It does not mean that we will like its results or that the Government automatically have to accept them. Nevertheless, the Minister sincerely undertook, for the first time ever, to review this ludicrous system.

I am disappointed that the review did not report as soon as it might have and that it was delayed for a year, but there is no justification for a well-resourced, responsible county council to pre-empt the result of the review, to believe that everything will be fine and to plan its affairs accordingly. That is like Mr. Micawber at his worst; it is a ludicrous way to carry on. Far from being paragons of financial rectitude, the county councillors showed complete irresponsibility if they operated on that basis. They should have conducted their revenue affairs more prudently.

Strange things have come to light. It has been found that a large sum was wasted by Cambridgeshire county council. The transportation department made a loss on its direct labour organisation estimated at £1.9 million—at least. The money has gone down the drain. What is more, the council has just announced bonuses for its staff amounting to no less than £400,000. It has had to call in Price Waterhouse and pay over a fee of £43,000 as a result of all this chicanery. The cost of sending out a new set of council tax bills is estimated at £300,000.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the loss by the transportation department—it is not condoned by anyone—began in 1992-93 under a Conservative administration? Will he further accept that the bonuses paid to staff were started by his noble Friend Lady Blatch when she led the county council? Finally, will he accept that Cambridgeshire complied with the call for an inquiry into the loss of the £1.9 million by bringing in Price Waterhouse, and paying the price for its services?

Sir Anthony Grant: With great respect to the hon. Lady, I do not care whether the system was set up by Winston Churchill, Disraeli or Campbell-Bannerman. That means nothing to me. We are discussing local authority finance and Cambridgeshire county council is responsibility for all its affairs. It is responsible for its books and it is in charge of the transportation department. The information that I read out was wrung out of the county council with great effort.

I calculate the grand total of the loss to be £2,643,000. That is equivalent to no fewer than 150 or 160 extra teachers, who could be employed in the education department. When the Lib-Lab county council was found out, it started whingeing and whining about party politics. Cambridgeshire local politicians of the Lib-Lab persuasion have never been shrinking violets about party politics—nor should they be. Having been hoist with their own petard and made a hash of their finances, they thought that they could pull a fast one on the council tax payers and the Government. An extra £11 million was undoubtedly made available for education in Cambridgeshire and diverted to other uses.

The Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), was absolutely right to say that the county council was treating parents and teachers with contempt. It deliberately set a budget exceeding the limits laid down by the Government because it hoped to use the loudest, most vocal clamour—that of the education lobby. The hon. Lady said that she had received many letters and so did I. Many of them had been dictated to children. People were told to keep writing to their Members of Parliament and all the letters were exactly the same.

The county council thought that by whipping up the education lobby, it could bully the Government and extract more money. When its financial incompetence and mischief were discovered, it tried to involve other councils in the same monkey business. Now that the council has been found out, the rights of council tax payers, which should have been the prime concern, have been protected by the order that we are debating tonight.

I shall undoubtedly continue to fight against the unfair area cost adjustment. I hope that the review will do justice to the cause of Cambridgeshire. Having said that, I support the Minister's decision tonight, as do all Members representing Cambridgeshire—excluding the hon. Lady of course—and the opposition in all Cambridgeshire councils. They will continue to fight that cause and their case will be made clear at next year's elections.

Mr. Hurd: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who cannot intervene, is in his place and supports what my hon. Friend is saying?

Sir Anthony Grant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I had spotted my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough. I read the powerful letter that he wrote and that the hon. Lady dismissed. It made sense to me and I quoted it with approval.

Finally, as I know that other Members wish to speak, let me say that I support the Minister's decision. It is high time that the interests of those who pay the bill—the unfortunate council tax payers who have to bear the brunt of all this nonsense and produce the cash—should be safeguarded at last and that is precisely what my right hon. Friend has done tonight.

8.13 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I begin by making two brief points about previous speeches. First, I thought that the Secretary of State made a bad mistake that I would not have expected of him when he said that, because a particular budget was possible, it must also be right. It is possible for Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire to set an even lower budget than they will be forced to do if the order is approved tonight. It is possible for them to cut the number of teachers further, to make more teachers redundant and to make class sizes even larger, but that does not make it right. So that was an extraordinarily weak point for the Minister to make.

The second point that I would like to take up was made by the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd). There is all the difference in the world between a theoretical increase and the theoretical amount of money that the Government apply to education and the actual decrease in the amount of cash that an authority has to spend.

It is somewhat ironic that the only two authorities being capped tonight are the Oxbridge counties. In the past, the Government have used only two excuses for introducing capping. One is to reduce the overall level of public expenditure and borrowing, and the other—this was referred to by the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant)—is to protect the public from outrageous increases in local taxes, including those levied by loony left authorities in the 1980s, but that is not the case today.

Let us consider those two possible excuses. It is worth examining some of the facts relating to public expenditure. The total of £13 million that the Secretary of State wishes to slice off the Oxbridge budgets amounts to 0.06 per cent. of the public sector borrowing requirement. It amounts to a mere 0.017 per cent. of the total spending by local authorities. As a proportion of total Government outlay, it represents not 1 per cent. or 0.1 per cent. but 0.000046 per cent. In macro-economic terms, it is a spit in the ocean, but for Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire it will make an enormous difference to service provision.

The second excuse for capping is the need to protect the public from excessive taxation. Hon. Members will agree that, whatever else we say about Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire local authorities, they are not loony left councils.

Members of all political parties now agree that capping should be lifted. Indeed, the Conservative party agreed that at its conference last year. Our motivations may differ, but the basic reason for cross-party opposition to capping is and always has been that capping inhibits the accountability of local councillors, as well as the ability of local authorities to respond to local needs. Surely that is the whole point of local democracy.

Councils should be free to adopt policies and budgets that match the priorities of their local people. Nobody likes a heavy tax burden, and the iniquities of the council tax are well known. However, if the people of Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire are willing to pay a little extra to provide their children with the education they deserve, and to ensure that community care is properly funded, who are the Government to deny them their wishes?

There has been a test of local opinion—the local elections only three weeks ago. In Cambridgeshire, the Conservatives suffered a net loss of four councillors. In Oxfordshire, they had a net loss of 14 councillors. The public know who is to blame for the cuts in services and the increases in council tax—the Government—and they have demonstrated their support for the position taken by the current Liberal Democrat and Labour administrations.

Anyone who comes to the House and whines about the difficulties that the poor old taxpayers will have to suffer if they are made to pay such a huge amount of council tax should look at the results of those local elections and realise that that is precisely what the council tax payers voted for. The council tax payers clearly rejected the Conservative alternative. Therefore, it is undemocratic for the Secretary of State to seek to overrule the local decision-making process in those counties. He is clearly not doing so for the sake of local people, who have made it clear that they do not want his solution.

Local people in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire clearly do not need protecting from a spendthrift local authority by an economical central Government. On the contrary, they need protecting from central Government and their refusal to follow the wishes of local people as they have expressed them through the ballot box.

Moreover, the argument that Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire should be capped because central Government should protect people from big spending councils is flawed in a another important way. Let us look a little more closely at how much the counties are spending.

Such things are, of course, relative, so I have chosen, as it happens, the one Conservative-controlled county, Buckinghamshire, for comparison. Buckinghamshire has just under 657,000 people and a budget of £413 million. In 1996-97, the county will therefore spend about £629 a head. Cambridgeshire has a proposed budget of £408 million—£5 million less than Buckinghamshire—but it has 687,000 people, which is 30,000 more than

[Mr. David Rendel]

Buckinghamshire. Spending per head is £594. Cambridgeshire spends £35 a head less than Conservative-run Buckinghamshire.

Oxfordshire has a proposed budget of only £344 million, and has 590,000 people. Spending per head is £583. Oxfordshire spends £46 per head less than Conservative Buckinghamshire. We are told from the Government Benches that, in practice, Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire are expensive councils. The Government should look at their own councils first.

I am not suggesting that Buckinghamshire is spending more than it should; that is not the point. The point is that the Government are using Parliament to impose Whitehall-calculated budgets on two counties on the basis that those counties are spending too much. Yet the evidence is clear: their spending is well below that of the only comparable Conservative authority. Their proposed budgets are moderate to low in terms of pounds spent per head, and they are the minimum that each county needs to maintain quality services.

Let us be under no illusions. The Government are going to impose severe cuts on both counties, which will hurt. We ought to bear in mind just what those cuts will mean. The pain will be felt most by children and their parents and by those who rely on social services—almost certainly, the most vulnerable members of both the communities.

Under the proposed budget, Oxfordshire would spend almost £4 million above the education standard spending assessment. With the cap, it will spend only £300,000 above the SSA. The impact on schools will be acute. As a result of the capping order, at least 160 Oxfordshire teachers are likely to lose their jobs, resulting in redundancy costs of £3.7 million at a time of rising pupil numbers, and increasing burdens being placed on schools by central Government.

One principal summed up the predicament of her Banbury school:

"This September, we had 60 more students with eight less teaching jobs and next September we will have 30 more, plus more in the sixth form."

That Banbury school is set to lose another five teachers.

Oxfordshire's social services are also reeling from cuts made last year, and more cuts this year are the last thing that is needed. I have received details from one woman in Abingdon who suffers from acute arthritis. She can barely move her hands and can walk only short distances, yet she still manages to look after her severely disabled husband. They have the help of a home carer twice a day, but the length of visits has been steadily reduced to less than half an hour. That lady is haunted by the fear that more social services cuts forced by central Government will stop home visits completely. As she says:

"They always ask about family. But we do not have anyone. I have been pressing for more help this year. But I am always given the same answer—there is not enough money in the budget."

Cambridgeshire has the fastest growing population of any English county. Nevertheless, it has had to make real-terms cuts in departmental budgets. Environment and heritage resources have been cut, direct and support services have been cut, transport services have been cut, and social services have been cut. The county has budgeted for additional expenditure on education, but that will be wiped out by the order, which will knock £5 million off its education budget.

If the order is passed, there will be up to 116 teaching redundancies. That will be on top of last year's horrendous settlement. Already, secondary school options have been dropped from the curriculum, and class sizes have risen to the point where sixth-form science students are working in classes of 30. Cambridgeshire's largest secondary school is making every effort to protect its teaching posts this year. Its contingency reserve has been reduced to just £464—not £464,000—and the school has 1,800 pupils.

Social services in Cambridgeshire are also being squeezed, but the order will cut a further £800,000 from its social services budget. Those cuts will have an impact on the 5,000 people who receive home care, the 2,500 people who receive meals on wheels and day-centre meals, and the 500 elderly people who have day care.

The grounds for capping either county simply do not exist. The implications for public expenditure as a whole are, as I have said, negligible. The proposed budgets on the other hand are entirely reasonable. Neither Oxfordshire nor Cambridgeshire can be called a big spender. By persisting with the cap, the Government have shown that Conservatives put party politics before local democracy and the needs of people.

The capping order subverts the electoral process, and will cause great damage to services in Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire. The young, the old, the weak and the infirm will bear the brunt of the Government's short-sightedness. Capping is wrong in principle, but, by applying it to those two counties, the Government are simply being vindictive and small-minded.

8.25 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the courtesy and objectivity with which he received the two delegations from Oxfordshire county council that I brought to see him this year to express the council's concern about the level of its revenue settlement grant and the level of its cap. I welcome the Government's decision to allow Oxfordshire a supplementary credit approval, and I hope that, in subsequent discussions with the county council, Ministers will continue to be helpful in agreeing the amount of approval. On that basis, and in that expectation, I shall be joining my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby after tonight's debate.

Nevertheless, while the effects of the cap will be mitigated by the new credit approval, I do not share the assessment of my right hon. and hon. Friends that the cap on Oxfordshire's budget is "reasonable, appropriate and achievable". I continue to be concerned about its effects in the current financial year and about the implications for next year's finances.

In taking that view, I stress that I agree with my Conservative colleagues on Oxfordshire county council, who also do not consider that Oxfordshire has sufficient resources to finance its services. At the time of the teachers' pay settlement last year, the Conservative group pressed for the difference between the SSA assumption for teachers' pay and the level of the actual settlement to be funded either by the Government or by an increase in

the cap. I supported them in that campaign, but it failed, leaving a shortfall of £1.8 million, which of course carries on into this year.

I also supported the Conservative group in its bid in January for an additional £1.9 million above the cap ceiling to cover the costs of the landfill tax and changes in pension fund regulations. I reckon that taking those together amounts to a minimum definition of a shortfall in the current year of at least £3.7 million.

Those have been the views of the Oxfordshire Tories, but at the same time, I have felt obliged to make my own independent judgment of the appropriateness of the limits being placed on Oxfordshire's spending. Last year, I was especially concerned about the level of funding for education that was envisaged in the 1995-96 local government settlement. That concern led me in the end to refuse to support the Government in the final vote on the question. I feel that my judgment has since been vindicated by the Government's decision in this year's settlement to accord special priority to education, with a national increase of 4.5 per cent. in the total standard spending assessment for schools.

In spite of that overall increase in the national level of funding for education this year, I remain of the view that the resources allowed to Oxfordshire are insufficient. That is partly a consequence of the overhang from last year's admittedly over-tight settlement. One of its consequences was that many schools in Oxfordshire drew down their balances, as the Secretary of State for Education and Employment urged them to do. To mitigate the cuts in 1995-96, the schools spent some £5 million from balances that cannot be spent again this year. That is why there is an overhang, for which the Government are at least partially compensating with the new credit approval, which was announced on Monday.

Behind these problems, there lies a deeper problem—that of the SSA system as it affects Oxfordshire. This is the critical issue, as it is the SSA calculations that determine both the level of the Government's grant to the county and the level of the cap that they place on the council tax. The Government are currently reviewing the SSA formula, and it is essential that all parties on Oxfordshire county council come together to agree a common position on the changes needed.

I fully understand that, in any distribution around an average, some are bound to be below the average and some above it. The problem is that Oxfordshire's SSA places us below the average to an extent that plainly does not reflect the reality of the county's financial requirements. For Oxfordshire county council, the national changes in SSAs, including the 4.5 per cent. allowed for education, have this year translated into only a 2.4 per cent. SSA increase, below that of all except seven of the other 34 shire counties.

I find it hard to understand why Oxfordshire has such a low-ranking SSA increase, when it faces above-average increases in the size of the key population groups: nought to four years, 11 to 15, 65 to 75 and over 75. The county has estimated that, together with inflation at 2.9 per cent. and the effects of new legislation at 0.75 per cent., these demographic factors at 1.15 per cent. have generated a 5.5 per cent. increase in the need to spend at a constant level of service. Yet Oxfordshire's SSA allows only for a 2.4 per cent. increase, rising to 3 per cent. under the cap ceiling.

It is a fair observation that, after Oxfordshire became a hung council in 1985, its expenditure rose too fast. But, in the light of a £45 million cut from the county's budget in the past five years, and in the light of the Audit Commission's comparison of the performance of local authorities, I do not think that it can be argued that nowadays Oxfordshire county council is relatively inefficient. On the contrary, the county council is a comparatively low spender, and the Audit Commission acknowledges that it is one of the more efficient counties.

Nevertheless, I have to say to the county that there is scope for further savings, which the continuing financial squeeze will require it to face up to. Councillors were wrong to reject the advice of the county's officers that Oxfordshire's old people's homes should be "externalised". I believe that the question of the schools structure and the number of schools in Oxford city should be reopened urgently. I also believe that the Government should be more supportive of the proposed changes than they were only a few years ago, when they turned down the county's previous proposals for rationalisation.

I have spoken at length about Oxfordshire's SSA, putting down markers for the review to which the Government are committed and which will, I hope, proceed urgently. I now want to generalise from the situation I have described.

I believe that the Government have become dangerously over-reliant on the principle of formula funding for public services. SSAs were invented to distribute central Government grant amounting to about half local authority funding. There has always been an element of rough justice in the SSA system, but it was a justice that all could understand, and, when needs were understated, the consequences could be mitigated by the local determination of business and domestic rates.

The business rate has now been taken out of the hands of local government and put on a formula basis, while council tax increases have been subject to caps, which in turn are based on SSAs. To borrow an analogy from another area of debate, the Government are trying to play golf with only one club, or—worse—they are forcing local government to play its game with only a single club on a course that is more than ever scattered with bunkers and surrounded by increasingly rough grass.

The Government must recognise the real dangers to locally delivered public services which that trend represents. More than 66 different changes in the methodology by which SSA is distributed were considered for 1996-97. Compared with the previous method of calculation, if all the seven best options had been chosen, Oxfordshire would have had £4 million more SSA than it actually got. If the worst six options had been chosen, Oxfordshire would have been given £9 million less SSA than it actually got.

Over the whole process hangs a promise of improbably large gains and the real spectre of disastrous losses. Meanwhile, the imposition of caps, also based on SSAs, in effect deprives local authorities of the means of coping with these statistical vagaries.

I know that there is a pressing need to control public borrowing and public spending, but I believe that, along with that, it is necessary to recognise that our people continue to expect good public services, and I believe that they are prepared to pay for them. In my view, when the history of the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

1990s comes to be written, their handling of local government will be the unhappiest chapter. It is a pity that the Government's record of success, which has been considerable in so many other areas, should be thus blemished.

8.34 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) for curtailing his speech to enable me to make this contribution. I will not embarrass him too much by praising the large part of it with which I agreed. It is a great shame that his vote will not follow the logic of his argument.

The hon. Gentleman's speech was a damning indictment of the argument by the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd). I have no desire to get into a slanging match with the right hon. Gentleman, who has given distinguished service to this country. However, he has done no service to our county this evening in describing as threadbare the arguments put forward locally by people of all parties and none. I remind him that there were Conservative members on the delegation that originally challenged the SSA. There is no doubt that the balance of opinion, as well as argument, within the county reflects the points made by his hon. Friend the Member for Wantage.

I too rise to speak in defence of essential services in Oxfordshire and the quality of provision, which will be severely damaged if the order is passed; there is no doubt about that. I want to give voice to the widespread and intense anger felt in the county as a result of what the Conservative party is doing to our services.

This debate is not about extra central Government spending. As my hon. Friends know, I would be the last person, as shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to argue for more or to pledge more. However, as hon. Members know, in the matter of local authority finances, there is quite properly a choice to be made locally—the trade-off between the level of council tax and the level of local services.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) said, except in the most exceptional circumstances, it should be up to local people to make that decision, and councillors should be accountable through the local electoral process. The order denies that choice to the people of Oxfordshire, just as it denies it to the people of Cambridgeshire.

Conservative Members should be under no illusions. Passing the order this evening will mean larger classes, poorer delivery of the national curriculum, an inability to cope with the pressure on residential home provision, cuts in family support services and care in the community, damage to library services and more accidents on even more poorly maintained roads. Up to 50 more teachers will lose their jobs on top of the 110 teachers in Oxfordshire who will lose their jobs even with the budget that the county council wants.

The damage that the order will impose is opposed by the overwhelming majority of Oxfordshire people. I pay tribute to the energetic and well-argued campaign waged locally by people of all parties and none, and to the public-spirited crusade that the *Oxford Mail* has run in support of local services. Local Members of Parliament have been inundated with petitions, letters, faxes and telephone calls from tens of thousands of Oxfordshire residents, 99 per cent. of whom have pleaded with them to oppose the cap and the cuts that will result.

Conservative Members should understand that, in voting for the order tonight, they are giving the strongest possible message to the people of Oxfordshire, the people of Cambridgeshire and the people of the country as a whole that today's Conservative party does not listen, does not care and is not fit to have ultimate control over people's education, social services, libraries and other local provisions.

The Government will argue, as they have before, that they have provided some extra flexibility by encouraging an application for extra borrowing approval in Oxfordshire. That will, indeed, help a little, but no figure has been given, so such an application can only ease some of the short-term transitional problems of implementing the capped budget, such as teacher redundancies. What is more, the Government's argument exposes their bankrupt logic. They will encourage extra borrowing to allow teachers to be sacked. What sort of system is that?

Like the hon. Member for Wantage, I thank the Minister of State for the courteous and seemingly open-minded hearing he gave our representations. However, I do not believe that he has listened enough, or that he has taken full account of the unfair damage that the cap will do to Oxfordshire's services. But, of course, he faced the problem that local Conservative councillors—who had supported our initial representations on the SSA—did not join us in opposing the cap and the damage that it would inflict. If he was receiving advice from such hon. Members as the right hon. Member for Witney, I am not surprised that Oxfordshire has come out of this as badly as it has.

I have no doubt that, if all Oxfordshire Members of Parliament had spoken up for their constituents' interests, and if Conservative councillors had joined us in this campaign, Oxfordshire could and would have extracted a better deal, even from this Government. As it is, the damage will be great. People in Oxfordshire are and will remain very angry.

No one has been able to answer one very simple question. Oxfordshire is not one of the councils that annually knocks on the Minister's door to object to capping and to plead special difficulties. The council supports, as do I, the drive for value for money in public services.

The council has already made very severe cuts in services. As we have heard, in the past five years it has already cut no less than £45 million from its expenditure. Its staffing levels have already been cut, including—last year alone—the loss of 220 teachers and educational support staff.

The council is an efficient authority that has been at the forefront of voluntary competitive tendering. Moreover, Audit Commission performance indicators show that the county has the third lowest expenditure per head of all the shire counties. So how on earth can the Government argue that this very low-spending county is somehow an overspender? That exposes the fallacy and the nonsense of the way in which the SSA system works, as the hon. Member for Wantage said a few moments ago.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman, who has a position in this matter as shadow Chief Secretary, tell us whether the Labour party intends to change that system?

Mr. Smith: The position is quite clear. I refer the hon. Gentleman to our documents on local authority organisation and expenditure, in which we make it very clear that—yes, indeed—we intend to review the system for local government support so as to make it fairer and to enable local democratic preferences properly to be expressed and reflected in local budgets, so that local people have the say in determining the level of resources of local services, which are there to meet local needs. That is what people want in Oxfordshire, that is what they want in Cambridgeshire, and that is what they want across the country.

As it is, this order is very damaging, as the hon. Member for Wantage knows very well. It is being imposed on two county councils that are already among the lowest spenders. What nonsense it is to claim that Oxfordshire—the third lowest-spending county per head of population—is somehow an overspender that must be punished. That punishment is being inflicted on children, on the elderly, and on vulnerable people who are most dependent on the essential services of our county. It is nonsense—very damaging and unfair nonsense—for which the Conservative party will pay dearly, and which today the House should reject by voting down the order.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 118.

Division No. 132] **[8.43 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Gyles Brandreth.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Etherington, Bill
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David

Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. John Cummings.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Council Tax Limitation (England) (Maximum Amounts) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 20th May, be approved.

A406 (Chingford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

8.54 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Although we have a little more time than usual, I hope not to detain the House or my hon. Friend the Minister for longer than necessary or for longer than I had anticipated.

The subject of the debate is the improvements to the A406 north circular road from Silver street to Hall lane. It is not usual for hon. Members even to contemplate raising such matters in the House, but I do so because, as my hon. Friend will see, the roadworks in question have caused a great deal of frustration and highlight the apparent inability of anyone to take responsibility for the hardship that residents have suffered and for what I now regard as the destruction of their daily lives.

The work on the A406 has caused my constituents severe problems, not only because of traffic congestion and noise but because of dust, the constant coming and going and the digging of ditches in the general area. Additional problems were caused by the way in which my constituents have been dealt with. I ask my hon. Friend to remember the unusually hot summer of 1995 when all my constituents, except the residents of Hall lane, were able to enjoy their gardens and have their windows open when the heat was intense. For the past two summers, residents of Hall lane have been locked in their houses, unable to have their windows open because of the dust and noise. Their gardens have essentially become no-go areas, which has forced them to take their children elsewhere to play. That may at first appear a small matter, but after two years it takes on greater proportions.

We all accept that the roadworks are important as they will help to relieve traffic congestion, but I wish to raise some serious matters which I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider reasonable. I shall go quickly through parts of a diary compiled by the people involved, which shows exactly what kind of nightmare they have experienced and how they have been treated. The combined diary was compiled by four people: Mrs. Mansoor of 317 Hall lane, Mrs. Fenton of 323 Hall lane, Mrs. Biggadike of 325 Hall lane and Mrs. Cook of 327 Hall lane.

The diary starts on 12 April 1994, not long after the roadworks commenced, when residents were offered double glazing. After they had badgered the authorities, Enfield council, which I understand was responsible for providing the grant, offered double glazing only for the front of their houses. That was the beginning of the row, because the position of the houses means that double glazing was necessary on at least two sides. The roadworks in effect wrap themselves around the properties and the noise and dust affects both sides.

Compressor noise began on 17 April and often continued through the night. On 7 May, the noise started earlier than intended. The usual story is that the noise started at 7 am and continued for the rest of the day, making it impossible for residents to go into their gardens. On 9 May, the diary records that there was again noise all day. On 16 June, generators were left on through the night, as happened on many other occasions.

On 17 June—let us remember that this was the summer of 1994—the noise started first thing in the morning, disrupting the residents for the rest of the day.

The thudding of lorries and the various other noises from major roadworks went on all the way through 1994 and into 1995. My hon. Friend the Minister will also note that, on a variety of days, residents wrote to complain to a number of authorities. On 4, 11 and 22 July and 8 August, they wrote a series of complaints to the Highways Agency. None was answered.

On 23 September, they were exasperated when a hole was dug in the road. Instead of sorting it out, the company slung a metal sheet over the top. All through the following night, residents were unable to sleep because heavy lorries were thumping up and down the road and waking them up. I am told that the vibrations were phenomenal. The diary entries tell almost exactly the same story. The residents expected work to take place during reasonable hours, but—perhaps because the contractors were falling behind—the hours were stretched. The residents' lives were abused because no one contacted them. Instead, the people involved simply acted beyond their brief. They started earlier, finished later and quite often did not check whether machinery was left on. Holes that had been dug in the road were left unfilled, creating problems with lorries. The lives of residents were made absolute hell.

The times on which work could be carried out were restricted, but Nuttalls wrote to the London borough of Waltham Forest to apply to work continuously to destroy the Lea valley storm water channel. The council agreed on the basis that the work would not cause excessive noise, and allowed Nuttalls to work seven days a week from 1 July. The change meant that the residents did not have a moment's peace during the whole week. Their occasionally peaceful times on Sundays now seemed to have gone for ever. The new Sunday working started at 7 am and quite often went on until 10 pm, and I draw my hon. Friend's attention again to the fact that it was a hot summer at that time. The new schedule meant that the residents' gardens were locked off to them on Sundays, and they all found it quite impossible. Nuttalls, who were blamed for the Sunday working, in turn blamed the people laying gas pipes or water mains. Everyone blamed everyone else, but the outcome was that my constituents had to suffer a seven-days-a-week nightmare.

The residents were not consulted on the increase in the working week. When work started, they felt that the noise of the demolition of the old viaduct was excessive, despite the fact that the local authority said that that would not be the case. That was the basis on which the authority had allowed the extra work. In a letter of 27 June to the residents, who had by now formed themselves into the Hall Lane Residents Association, the London borough of Waltham Forest environmental protection department said that work that did not disturb neighbours was permitted outside these hours. But, as the residents pointed out endlessly, that was not the case, and the noise was excessive in the sense that it was almost the same as would have been the case during a normal working day. On 8 July, piling work was done and machines were left on while that work was taking place on the Saturday from 7.30 am to 11 am. On 31 July, the machines worked from 7.30 am around the clock.

Double glazing and secondary glazing grants were obtained for the front of the properties from Enfield council, acting as agents for the Highways Agency. But the row continued about the requirement for double glazing for the rear of the houses. There was a flat refusal by the Highways Agency to allow the residents to put in double glazing. That struck me as a mean-minded and petty point; the authority should have understood the nature of the complaints from my constituents. The residents were told that the noise that was measured at certain times of the day did not reach the absolute maximum that would have allowed the Highways Agency to agree to provide double glazing. That struck me as a small way to behave towards a small number of residents, who were therefore unable to have any satisfaction or relief from the noise even inside their houses.

The problems continued endlessly, however. The residents became sealed into their homes, unable to leave. One 84-year-old constituent of mine who lived just up the road had to be carried over a ditch outside her house because she was unable to cross it: she was manhandled over it and back for two weeks. A situation that was supposedly temporary—it was meant to last for only a few days—lasted for a fortnight.

The bureaucratic excuses mounted. Attempts were constantly made to spread the blame; no one seemed to be responsible. If residents went to one side—be it the Highways Agency or Frederick Snow—they were told that the other side was responsible. Alternately, they were told that they should look to the insurers, or that Nuttalls was responsible. When they went to Nuttalls, they were told that the fault lay with someone laying pipes in conjunction with the firm, or with the gas or water company. When they raised the matter with those companies, they were told that Nuttalls was doing all the damage. They were chased from one concern to another.

I share that frustration. Having met my constituents in their homes and discussed their problems with them, and having visited the area a number of times to try to experience the noise and dust that they were experiencing, I took up the issue with the various parties. As my hon. Friend the Minister probably already knows—he will certainly know from what I have said tonight—I was given the runaround by exactly the same agencies. I might just as well have been a resident.

On 19 May I wrote to Lawrie Haynes, chief executive of the Highways Agency, after a meeting of the residents of Hall lane. I wrote:

"Apart from the fact that these road works have been going on since February 1994, they have been joined by British Gas and Thames Water relaying pipes. What is of the greatest concern to me is that throughout this period the residents have received very little assistance from the Highways Agency and have had to fight tooth and nail in order to get the agency to accept the fact that they have had to put up with appalling conditions.

On a recent visit to these houses during the day it is perfectly obvious that the cracks in their walls and ceilings and the ever present dust are clearly as a result of all the work being carried out outside their front doors. They do not ask for much, but after having received grants for from insulation they have discovered that this was not enough to keep out the noise and dust from the road works, they have spent the past eight months trying to secure insulation for the rear of their properties.

Each of the organisations they have contacted about the work being carried out outside their properties blame the other for the disruption. The residents are understandably feeling more and more frustrated."

It did not seem much to ask, I said, that people who had been affected as badly as my constituents, whose environment had been so disrupted, should not have to

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

fight so long even to have that acknowledged, let alone dealt with. A bit of common sense and understanding could have resolved the matter at an early stage, and avoided the unnecessary blighting of lives. I concluded:

"I should be grateful if you and an independent assessor could visit these homes."

We seemed to be engaged in a Chingford version of the Scottish reel. All those responsible were running around my constituents; every now and then, one would dip his head and move on.

The Highways Agency eventually replied to my letter of 19 May on 23 August. Its chief executive, Lawrie Haynes, wrote:

"I am concerned that the residents feel their complaints have not been properly addressed. Under the contract the contractor is responsible for dealing with all claims for damage arising from the works, including valid claims for unavoidable damage. The contractor is also responsible for ensuring that the works are carried out without unreasonable noise, disturbance or damage and it is for the contractor to see that his work-people and sub-contractors behave carefully and avoid causing injury to other people."

No one appears to have pressed the contractors to carry out their contractual obligations.

Residents were then told by the construction engineers, Frederick Snow, that they were fed up with Nuttalls—the contractors—who had failed to keep their promises to improve matters for residents. That was in a letter from my constituent Mrs. Biggadike. I wrote to the chief executive of Nuttalls on 5 October. I said in my letter:

"These people have been passed back and forward between all those involved with the building of this road and it is high time that this matter was resolved."

I was graced with no reply from Nuttalls. To this day, I await a reply from the chief executive. On 3 May, I was forced to write again to Nuttalls. I said:

"What has become very clear is that both Sir Frederick Snow and the Highways Agency believe that the responsibility for much of the problem lies in your hands and that your company should rectify this."

I do not intend to detain my hon. Friend the Minister much longer, but I must ask him a series of questions. In something as major as this set of roadworks, which clearly has to take place and is likely to bring great benefit to the area, as my hon. Friend knows, why are the contractors and those working in the area allowed simply to get away with behaving so intolerably to those who live there? All my constituents accepted that they would have to put up with difficulties and with a degraded quality of life for a period of time. What they did not accept and could not understand was why they were treated as though their lives were so insignificant to those carrying out the work. They have been ignored, shunted from pillar to post and left to hang—in the hope, I suspect, that if they were left long enough they would not bother the contractors or anyone else any more.

The residents' demands amount to about four or five action points. They still want grants for the cost of double glazing to the rear of their properties. They want the damage from piling—the massive vibrations that cause cracks—resolved by an independent surveyor. Dust, noise and exhaust fumes have taken their toll and they want a full examination of those problems. As they have said, they want compensation for the general state of their houses and the filth that they have had to put up with. Most of all, they want someone to tell them at some stage, "Mea culpa: I will resolve this—it is my problem and I will sort it out for you; let us resolve the matter." Why can we not force someone to say, "The buck stops here"?

9.11 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on bringing these matters to the attention of the House. It is one of the huge virtues of our parliamentary system that he is able to draw to the attention of the House his concerns on behalf of the residents of Hall lane. If he is in any doubt as to where the buck stops, I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be prepared to remind him that it has stopped here and now at this Dispatch Box tonight. I shall endeavour to do what I can to answer his concerns and set his mind at rest. He will know that I have one advantage, in that he and I are neighbours in that part of London and I know Hall lane extremely well.

I am sorry to hear about the problems that the residents of Hall lane have been experiencing. Obviously, they have had to contend with a lot of activity in the vicinity while the improvements have been carried out. I very much regret that the inconvenience that has been caused by the roadworks is to some degree inevitable. I am grateful to him for acknowledging the fact that it is impossible to construct a scheme of that sort without some disruption.

The contractor is instructed, however, to ensure that the works are carried out without unreasonable noise, damage or disturbance, and we try to make every effort to ensure that that disruption is kept to a minimum. We try to eliminate some of the noise problems before construction begins, and all the properties in Hall lane that were eligible under the use criteria were insulated against noise.

I suspect that my hon. Friend will know that there are two bases on which we consider the adverse effect on properties. One is the adverse effect during construction and the other is the effect on properties once the road scheme is in use. We project forward noise levels some six years from the date of opening to allow for traffic growth. With those use criteria, we insulated those properties against noise, had secondary glazing installed or offered to make a grant towards double glazing.

Traffic noise calculations for properties in the vicinity of a road improvement scheme are all made on the same basis. Only properties that are predicted to receive noise above the minimum qualifying level receive an offer of secondary glazing. I know that some residents were very disappointed that they did not receive an offer of insulation for the rear facades of their properties, but I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that we are restricted in what we can do, because we have to comply with the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975, which apply to traffic noise.

On construction noise, we have to consider matters carefully, given the limited time scale between the nuisance and making offers to residents. It would need to be shown that such insulation would be of positive and long-term benefit and that it gave value for money. We offered noise insulation to 19 eligible properties in Hall lane, and 11 residents accepted our offer. About half of those were because of anticipated construction noise.

My hon. Friend pointed out that there has been some confusion about relevant contact points when problems and queries arise. I sympathise about that, but I hope that

he accepts that the brochure that we issued at the beginning of the works, explaining the improvements to the local residents, stated clearly the names and telephone numbers of the representatives on site. Whenever verbal complaints have been received from members of the public, they have been advised that the consultant's representative, the resident engineer, is the first point of contact and that the consultant's representative is there for any complaints that arise during the course of the works.

The resident engineer has clear instructions on the action to take once he is aware of a problem. If the complaint is about work being carried out on site, perhaps about the position of machinery or noise levels, and the contractor is working outside the conditions of his contract, he will take action and follow it up with the contractor. However, it is not always simple to put matters right when, for example, special equipment is not available, or lane closures are required for access to enable remedial work to be carried out. Traffic management, safety measures and so on, all have to be taken into consideration. The resident engineer operates specifically within the contract and statutory regulations framework.

If the complaint is a potential third-party claim for damages, the resident engineer has to decide who should deal with it. The contractor's insurers are usually the first port of call, but it may be necessary to involve the district valuer or a statutory undertaker who is not working on the scheme. Again, under the contract, the complaint may need to be referred directly to the Highways Agency. Complaints are passed on to the relevant person for follow-up action, and every member of the public concerned should receive a written reply advising them what has happened to their complaint or claim.

I know that the Highways Agency has recently been alerted to correspondence between Nuttalls, the contractors, and my hon. Friend. I am distressed to learn of the discourteous way in which my hon. Friend's correspondence appears to have been treated, although I note from a copy of a letter from the chief executive that he claims that my hon. Friend's earlier letter was not received. I am sure that he accepts that assurance. I know that the contractor is concerned that the residents of Hall lane believe that they have been badly treated by the contractor and he will, at the earliest opportunity, take the necessary steps to resolve those issues.

I shall ask the Highways Agency to ensure that the contractor's working methods comply fully with the terms of the contract because I am distressed to learn of the details that my hon. Friend has given, which suggest that standards have fallen below those that residents adjacent to such schemes are entitled to expect. I understand that certain residents were especially inconvenienced by maintenance works carried out by Thames Water. Although they were carried out concurrently with the contract, they were not connected with the scheme or with the Highways Agency work.

We try to ensure that all claims made by the public, especially those who live and work close to the improvement scheme, are dealt with promptly and that they are passed to the contractor and his insurers by the resident engineer.

I shall set out the framework, because it is important that my hon. Friend understands the framework in which contracts always operate. Under this contract, the contractor is required to indemnify the Secretary of State against all third-party claims arising from the works, including valid claims for unavoidable damage or loss. On that basis, we cannot interfere directly with the contractor's responsibilities, but we do monitor progress on third-party claims and we ask our consultants to remind the contractor of his responsibilities for resolving and settling claims for damage and disruption.

For the record, there have been seven third-party claims from residents in the vicinity, of which two have been settled, four have not been followed up by the claimants and one is being assessed. In the context of a scheme of that type, that is not an especially large number of claims, but equally, there is no excuse for the intolerable behaviour described by my hon. Friend, and I shall ensure that the Highways Agency takes that point very seriously.

The contractor is responsible for the work methods of his work force and of subcontractors employed by him, and he must ensure that they conduct themselves responsibly, paying close attention to the safety interests of local people and the travelling public. We and the Highways Agency are not in the best position to do so, and I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that. If we did become involved, we would dilute the responsibility of the contractor for his staff, and I am keen that we should not enter such a situation.

I appreciate that some residents have been worried about the reduction in value of their properties, because my hon. Friend mentioned that issue to me when he was fortunate enough to secure the debate. In certain circumstances, they may claim compensation under the provisions of part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973. To qualify for that compensation, the reduction in value must be directly attributable to the use of the new road and must be caused by factors such as noise, vibration or smoke.

A booklet is available from the agency, entitled "Your Home and Nuisance from Public Development", which explains the basis of compensation and eligibility. I am happy to let my hon. Friend have as many copies as he likes or to send them directly to anyone who he would like to receive them.

The district valuer, who is entirely independent of the Department, as my hon. Friend knows, is responsible for assessing, negotiating and recommending the amount of compensation payable. The claim period begins a year after the road is open to public traffic, and lasts for six years. Notices will be published in local newspapers nearer the time, advising people of their rights under the Act and explaining how to make a claim.

In essence, that is the protection that people are given by Parliament in terms of any substantial difference in the noise levels once the scheme, having been completed, is in operation. It is important to bear it in mind that that means, not that a specific, absolute level of noise is attained a year after the scheme is open, but more especially that there has been a significant difference in the noise level as the basis on which compensation is payable.

I hope to end, if my hon. Friend will allow me, on a slightly more optimistic note, because he and I know, and I am pleased to be able to report, that the improvements on the north circular at the Hall lane site are almost complete.

[Mr. Steve Norris]

The south end of Hall lane has been identified for planting in our outline landscape proposals, and it is our intention to approach residents there shortly, with a view to carrying out some off-site screen planting in their gardens by agreement as soon as practicable. As my hon. Friend knows, Hall lane runs effectively at right angles to the north circular, and the planting in the front gardens of those properties will provide screening against the sight of the scheme and, one hopes, some amelioration, but that will be done in co-operation with the residents.

Major civil engineering works of the type that we have carried out on that site—the north circular road being one of the largest civil engineering works of its kind in the country, and certainly a very long-standing scheme in the area that my hon. Friend and I represent—inevitably cause some inconvenience and disruption. For that, I offer my condolences to people locally. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being so generous as to accept that, in such circumstances, sadly, there will be an element of disruption. It was the type of summer that probably aggravated the dust and the general effect of such a scheme.

We shall try to minimise problems on the site. I assure my hon. Friend that, if he has any further concerns, he has only to raise the subject with me and I shall personally deal with the matter and with Mr. Haynes at the Highways Agency, who, in my experience, has always been extraordinarily co-operative and helpful.

At the end of a day not long from now, local people in that area will begin to enjoy the benefits of the improvements instead of the rather more unfortunate short-term side effects.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Nine o'clock till Tuesday 4 June, pursuant to Order [13 May].

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 June 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Enterprise Zones

1. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy towards establishing new enterprise zones. [29769]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State apologises to the House for not being present for questions today. Madam Speaker, as you and others are aware, he is representing the United Kingdom at the United Nations Habitat II conference in Istanbul.

In December 1987 the Government announced that the enterprise zone scheme would not be extended other than in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Hutton: Given that the Government's economic advisers, Cambridge Economic Consultants, recommended in 1992 that the Government establish a new enterprise zone in Barrow and that, since then, the number of people out of work and claiming unemployment benefit has increased by 45 per cent.—more than in any other area which is at present covered by an enterprise zone—is the Minister now prepared to accept the principal recommendation of the Furness 2010 conference report, of which he has a copy? The report makes it clear that it is absolutely critical to establish a new enterprise zone in the Barrow travel-to-work area.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am very aware of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the matter. We have discussed the issue with the Government office for the north-west, and I anticipate being able to meet the hon. Gentleman and a delegation to consider the matter. I suggest that we approach the issue with some caution.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, EZs have been successful in the past. However, the European Community rules on state aid mean that there are delays—sometimes of up to three years—between announcement and implementation, and that can cause a dearth of investment in the area and prove counter-productive. I will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter, but I ask him to think carefully before progressing.

Mr. Dover: Does my hon. Friend recall that he replied to my Adjournment debate on Royal Ordnance and the possible establishment of an enterprise zone at Chorley in my constituency? Will he confirm that the exceptional circumstance that would justify an enterprise zone application through the European Union would be a massive rundown in traditional industries, such as the coal mining and the ship building industries in Barrow and the armaments industry in Chorley, which have been designated since 1987? Will he confirm that even a [illegible]-year delay would be more than acceptable to the areas in question?

Sir Paul Beresford: I am aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed on several occasions. However, as I have told him before, he must think very carefully before progressing further.

Mr. Vaz: Why will the Minister not admit that fatal flaws lie at the heart of the Government's regeneration policy? There is a lack of cohesion and coherence in the Government's strategy, whether it is enterprise zones or any of the 29 schemes that they have launched in the past 17 years. Will the Minister accept the views of the public and private sectors and implement long-lasting policies rather than the quick-fix solutions that the Government advocate?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman does not learn. If he looks around the country, he will see that any flaws and difficulties are created by the neanderthal Labour authorities in many of our cities.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that enterprise zones are successful only if this country can offer competitive economic conditions to internal investors? Does he believe that those conditions would be improved by the adoption of a national minimum wage and the social chapter or by the abolition of the Government's industrial relations reforms?

Sir Paul Beresford: As ever, my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. He has touched on the point that Labour local authorities consistently and persistently fail to see.

Air Pollution

2. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding air pollution. [29770]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The Department receives numerous representations on that subject.

Mr. Wareing: I am sure that it does. What intergovernmental wrangling is causing the delay in the publication of a national air strategy? Given that my local authority is one of those used to pilot the air quality assessment scheme, should it not be given proper national guidelines and resources? Or do we see another illustration of the Government's lack of real commitment to the environment?

Mr. Clappison: The local authorities that are involved in the air quality strategy are showing a much more positive attitude than the hon. Gentleman. He could be a little more positive about an important document that follows on from the commitments in the Environment Act 1995, which will stand alongside the Clean Air Act 1956 as a major contribution to cleaning up the air we breathe and will bring about substantial improvements. When the strategy is published, the hon. Gentleman will see that it is based on sound science and will make a major contribution to our health.

Mr. Robathan: Is my hon. Friend aware that air pollution would be greatly reduced if more people left their motor cars at home and walked or used bicycles? Is my hon. Friend aware that this week is National Bike Week, and does he agree that it would be extremely beneficial if many Members of the House took to bicycles and did not create emissions and hot air, which pollute the environment? My hon. Friend might note that the health of one or two Opposition Front Benchers would also benefit.

Mr. Clappison: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to think that if hon. Members took to their bicycles, it might reduce the hot air. If people took to their bicycles more generally, important reductions in emissions might occur. There are opportunities for people to use the bicycle instead of other forms of transport, and that would reduce emissions. I know that my hon. Friend is a major proponent of the use of bicycles and I am sure that he will take to his bicycle tomorrow.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Given that Europe is due this year to agree stage 3 vehicle emission standards and that the rising levels of asthma, especially in children, are exacerbated by air pollution, will the Government take a robust position at stage 3 and build on the German Ministry of the Environment's proposals?

Mr. Clappison: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have taken a leading role in pushing for higher standards of vehicle technology and fuel cleanliness. That has made a major contribution in reducing emissions, and we will continue with that.

The hon. Gentleman should also bear in mind the leading role that we have taken to try to reduce summertime smog, which can also be a cause of the health problems that he mentioned. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently hosted a conference of European nations in London, which put forward plans to reduce the prevalence of summertime smog. Those plans will bring real benefits and will be an ambitious step to tackle a real problem.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Notwithstanding the excellent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), will my hon. Friend confirm that estimates show that car traffic is likely to increase by between 11 and 19 per cent. and lorry traffic by up to 16 per cent. over the next six years? Given the stricter emission controls introduced by the Government in 1992 and 1996, will my hon. Friend try to plan the Government's air quality strategy so that the amount of pollution from vehicles is lower overall at the end of the six years, and not greater?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the issue needs careful long-term planning. We have been planning carefully on a base of sound science to bring about long-term reductions in emissions. That is why we will introduce a national air strategy, which will be a document for the future and enable major improvements to be made in the air that we breathe.

Council Tax

3. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authority expenditure is represented by council tax collected in (a) Ellesmere Port and Neston and (b) Westminster. [29771]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Forty-three per cent. and 14 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Miller: Those are interesting twists of the official statistics. The Minister will recognise that Ellesmere Port and Neston borough has a better council tax collection rate than the city of Westminster and is better on planning times and a whole host of the measures set out by the Audit Commission, yet the council tax collected from residents in Ellesmere Port—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question.

Mr. Miller: Is it the case that the council tax collected from residents of Ellesmere Port and Neston constitutes 33 per cent. of spending compared with 4 per cent. for Westminster? Is that not a disgrace and yet another Tory fiddle that disadvantages a well-run, Labour-controlled local authority?

Mr. Curry: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman got to his peroration in the end, albeit with some prompting. His figures are out of date, which is not surprising. The key statistic is that Ellesmere Port and Neston council sets a budget that is 20 per cent. higher than its standard spending assessment. If Westminster set a budget 20 per cent. above its SSA, it would have to fund 35 per cent. of its expenditure from the council tax. If Westminster set a budget 13 per cent. below its SSA and Ellesmere Port and Neston did the same, the borough could hand back £85 to band D council tax payers and would have to raise only 17 per cent. from council tax. If the Ellesmere Port and Neston council budget is so terrible, it is surprising that its Member of Parliament made no representations at the time of consultation.

Local Government Expenditure

4. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received about the abolition of local authority capping; and how many supported abolition. [29772]

Mr. Curry: We have received a number of representations on local authority capping, and many were in favour of its abolition. We also receive many letters from council tax payers complaining about high council taxes.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that even-handed reply. Does he agree that the abolition of capping would ensure a greater measure of responsibility and responsiveness being added to local authorities—particularly in respect of spending and spending policies? Does my hon. Friend further agree that local authorities would be less dependent on central Government for additional funding? Does my hon. Friend agree also that there would be much greater accountability and that abolishing capping would add a new dimension to local democracy?

Mr. Curry: The answer to my hon. Friend's questions is obviously yes—of course it would. If local authorities could raise more of their own expenditure, local councillors would welcome that and would be more accountable in that sense. As I have constantly said in the House, there are two sides to the question. If I were a councillor, of course I would argue that capping should go, because I would like to raise what I want to spend. Central Government must take account of the fact that 25 per cent. of public expenditure is accounted for by local council spending, so no Government can afford to neglect to take a view on that volume of expenditure, given the effective management of the whole economy. There are two rights in conflict and, sensibly, we try to find a way to reconcile them and help local authorities, while making sure that central Government's economic management remains impeccable—because the economy needs local taxpayers most of all.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Minister aware of the widespread dismay in Cambridgeshire caused by the Government's decision to cap Cambridgeshire's budget at the standard spending assessment? Surely local people ought to decide how large class sizes or the charge levied in respect of elderly people who need care should be? Those matters cannot be decided by central Government.

Mr. Curry: If it is so self-evident that such decisions must be taken by local councils and that central Government have no part to play, I am surprised that the Labour party is so strongly committed to maintaining the capping legislation on the statute book. That legislation acknowledges that, at the end of the day, central Government must take a view of total public expenditure. That is the origin of the argument about capping. I acknowledge that there is an argument from local councils about their autonomy and ability to take local decisions—I have never denied that. However, I acknowledge also as a Minister that the Government must take a view of a sensible level of public expenditure in the economy as a whole. We have been doing that, and we would be irresponsible not to do so.

Mr. Pickles: Is my hon. Friend aware that one consequence of abolishing capping would be higher council tax bills? Is he aware that, in a recent survey conducted by *The Sunday Times* among the leaders of 80 Labour authorities, more than half said that they would increase the bills if capping were removed? Is my hon. Friend further aware that it was estimated that, just among the authorities sampled in that survey, an extra £500 million would be taken out of council tax payers' pockets?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The instinct of Labour-controlled local authorities is always to want to raise more taxes. That is why I believe that if the Labour party got into office it would demonstrate exactly the same instinct.

House Building

5. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest annual figures for house building; and what was the figure in 1978. [29774]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): A total of 188,700 new homes were completed in Great Britain in 1995. There were 279,800 completions in 1978.

Mr. Skinner: After 17 years of Tory Government, is it not a fact that 67,000 local authority homes were completed in 1978—the last full year of a Labour Government—and that in 1995 the number is down to a miserable 612 for the whole of the country? We have 500,000 bricklayers and construction workers on the dole. We have bricks piled up at the London Brick Company. Construction companies are going to the wall. Is it not time that the Government pulled their finger out and did something about releasing capital receipts? Do not blame the minimum wage and the social chapter for this disaster.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is confusing two issues. We are trying to ensure that we make the most effective use of existing stock. Therefore, what is important is the number of tenancies, not the number of new buildings. A large number of schemes are in place to create extra vacancies into which people can move, to ensure that we effectively manage existing stock.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has never been a better time for first-time buyers to buy their homes? More than that, they have the incentive of mortgage rates, which are at their lowest level for 30 years. Is that not a justification of the Government's policies? They are a success and people are going with it.

Mr. Jones: Of course my hon. Friend is right. Not only are mortgage rates low at the moment by historical standards, but they are also affordable, because of the rise in real incomes and the fall in mortgage rates; so now is a good time not just for first-time buyers but for other buyers to put their hat into the ring and buy a house.

Ministerial Rail Travel

6. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of his official travel in the last 12 months has been undertaken by rail. [29776]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend, with Ministers from other Departments, uses the railways whenever it is the most cost-effective and feasible form of transport.

Mr. Griffiths: Why did the Minister not give me the percentage? Surely the Department keeps a record of miles travelled or journeys undertaken. I suggest that he

set a personal example on the control of emissions into the atmosphere. Why did the hon. Gentleman not give me the figures?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman asks for a personal example. I can tell him that, since I have been a Minister, I have made 20 visits outside London, 15 of which were made by train. I can also tell him that I used the train and the tube to come to work today from my constituency, as I do regularly. I practise what I preach. Those who do not practise what they preach inhabit the Opposition Front Bench.

Environmental Agreements

7. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the international environmental agreements to which the UK is a party, and the extent to which the UK has met its obligation under those agreements. [29778]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has a very good record of complying with international agreements.

Mr. Bennett: I wonder whether the Minister will place in the Library a list of all the financial commitments that we have made under the Montreal protocol, the Rio agreement and others, the dates when we made the payments and the dates when we should be making the payments. Does he appreciate that many people in developing countries feel that we are using environmental agreements as an old form of colonialism to impose our views on them? Will he ensure that we do all that we can to transfer technology from developed countries to underdeveloped countries to ensure that they can meet high environmental standards?

Mr. Clappison: We provide full and appropriate information about the activities that we undertake. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the Government have honoured their commitments under both the agreements that he mentioned. On the Rio commitments, we recently produced our proposals for biodiversity, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, include help towards conservation in developing countries—a very important contribution to help them to meet their commitments. I think that about £130 million is the sum in the global environment facility fund. Also, on the climate convention and carbon dioxide emissions, we have more than exceeded our promises. We have also complied with our agreements on the Montreal protocol. When the Government enter into international commitments, they keep them.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Has my hon. Friend seen the international reports stating that the ozone layer is recovering—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) can sunbathe again if he likes. Is that recovery not due to this Government's excellent environmental policies, which lead the world?

Mr. Clappison: The ozone layer has benefited from our commitment to the Montreal protocol, as well as a number of other international indicators.

Mrs. Ewing: Obviously, the Minister has recognised that the disposal of any form of waste is a matter for international concern. Has he read the recent report on the disposal of nuclear waste at Dounreay in the north of Scotland? It shows that, some 30 years ago, there was a disposal of about 1,400 tonnes of fissile material, including caesium and uranium. Does that breach any international agreement? Will the hon. Gentleman give a commitment to hold a public inquiry into the situation and will he ensure that the House is kept fully informed of developments?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady will be aware that waste licensing is covered by a very strict regime—and the type of waste to which she referred comes under an especially strict regime. If she will let me have the details, I shall look into the matter.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that the Government now intend to comply fully with the European urban waste water treatment directive? Will he also confirm that the Government will not repeat their previous efforts, which were turned down in the courts, to re-define the boundaries of the Humber and Severn estuaries, leaving half-treated sewage floating past Bristol and Hull?

Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government's lawyers, when giving evidence in court, said that the Government had taken that action to save money so that things would be easier for the already fat cat bosses of Yorkshire Water and Wessex Water?

Mr. Clappison: We have just heard a contribution to hot air. The public want a continued improvement in the quality of our bathing waters and rivers. They want clean water. Under any objective scientific test, standards are improving and British people have a higher quality of water than ever before.

Challenge Funding

8. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend challenge funding. [29779]

Mr. Curry: We announced on 15 May the Government's decision to proceed with a pilot scheme for the allocation of local authority credit approvals through competitive bidding.

Mr. Booth: Is my hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members, at least, welcome the success of challenge funding and the principles behind it, especially as they affect inner cities? We also welcome its extension to other areas and the help that it will provide for estate action. The Opposition will never understand such success, nor could they ever achieve it, because they do not understand competition.

Mr. Curry: I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend's view. I regret that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was not at the Leeds Armories 10 days ago to hear his hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) praising the single regeneration budget and the principle behind the

Government's regeneration policies. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is 15 years out of date.

It is true to say that our programmes based on competition work because they oblige people to get together, to put common programmes together and to secure additional funding—and therefore they get the best out of people and out of communities. Those are the principles to which we shall continue to adhere.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the justification for extending a system which, frankly, owes more to presentation than to substance?

Mr. Curry: The system of competitive bidding and regeneration owes everything to substance. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to take a trawl around the United Kingdom—perhaps by bicycle, if he is to follow the Opposition's precepts—and call in on some of the city challenge programmes and single regeneration budget programmes. He should also look at some of the urban development corporations. He will find that Labour authorities which, five or six years ago, were hostile to their very establishment are now saying that it has been an extremely productive use of funding, that competition works and that they hope that the programmes will continue. I pay tribute to those local authorities that are now acting co-operatively, working well and creating partnerships to deliver benefits for their communities. That is because the Government started that approach and I am glad that other people are following. The hon. Gentleman will eventually follow them.

Wind Farms

10. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing planning guidelines in respect of wind farms; and if he will make a statement. [29781]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Planning policy guidance note 22, "Renewable Energy", provides comprehensive, robust and relevant advice on planning and wind farms in England. Our policy is to encourage the development of renewable energy sources so long as they are both economically attractive and environmentally acceptable.

Mr. Kennedy: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that there is sensible all-party support for alternative sources of energy, not least renewables of this kind, but that, obviously, this needs to be balanced by the circumstances in each case? Will he consider—it is a typical example—the concern that exists in the highlands of Scotland, to which, I appreciate, his remit does not run in planning matters? Does he agree with the local planning authority there—this is as relevant south of the border—that these applications need to be conformable with local plans to ensure that the new brutalism that the Secretary of State has occasionally warned against is avoided at all costs?

Mr. Jones: As the hon. Gentleman says, the particular case is one for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman: it is important to get the balance right. We all subscribe to renewable energy sources as a principle, but it is remarkable how rarely people are prepared to support their location in a particular instance. One of the things that local authorities can do is identify the best sites in their development plans so that they can be identified well in advance of any planning applications. That will serve to mitigate any controversy.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend recall that, in the 1980s, the so-called green movement championed wind farms? Will he confirm that the principal objectors to such schemes these days are those who are allied to the so-called green movement?

Mr. Jones: I am sorry to have to say that my hon. Friend is right. Often, those who subscribe to these ideas in principle are those who then campaign against any particular application of them. In that respect, green pressure groups are no different from the Liberal party.

Mobile Homes

11. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the application of the council tax to mobile homes. [29782]

Sir Paul Beresford: A mobile home that is someone's sole or main residence and that is stationed with a degree of permanence will, with its pitch, constitute a dwelling, chargeable for council tax.

Mr. Barnes: Did the Minister see Chatsworth house in Derbyshire on the telly last night? It is rather larger than a mobile home owned by one of my constituents, which is worth £3,000 on the open market. Is it reasonable that the Duke of Devonshire, the owner, for some reason, of Chatsworth house, should pay only three times as much council tax as someone in a mobile home? Should there not be a much wider distinction between the two so that there is greater range and a greater number of bands is considered?

Sir Paul Beresford: If in fact that is correct, I would be suspicious about the valuation because, of course, it is not the variety of property, but the capital value of the property, that counts.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that what lies behind the slightly bizarre supplementary question to him is that the Labour party wants to escalate the amount of council tax paid in the range referred to in the question? The question that arises in our minds, therefore, is what does Labour have in mind for people living in semi-detached and detached houses in my constituency. Is not the answer to that large bills—as has been let out of the bag today?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend has touched on just one aspect of the escalating burden on the taxpayer at every level that Labour would place on people, if it ever had the power to do so.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: I wonder whether the Minister would like to try again? Is he really suggesting that, because the mobile home's capital value, at £3,000, is not very different from that of Chatsworth house, it therefore does not matter that Chatsworth house's owner pays only

three times as much council tax as the mobile home's owner? Why will the Minister not consider extending council taxes so that they become a more equitable way of paying for local government?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady seems to have missed the point that I was making, but that does not surprise me. We are talking about a simple system that is easily worked out. The banding was discussed. What she is asking for would involve dramatic changes, cost council tax payers very much more and complicate the system beyond what the general public could understand.

Challenge Funding

12. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his plans for further rounds of the single regeneration budget challenge fund. [29783]

Mr. Curry: Bidding guidance for the third round of the single regeneration budget was published on 29 March, and the deadline for outline bids is this Friday.

Mr. Thompson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are providing more than £2 million over four years to assist a scheme to revitalise the Mile Cross area of my constituency, providing extra jobs, extra training and many improvements to housing? Will he also confirm that he is monitoring carefully how the money is spent? Is he surprised that Labour-controlled Norwich city council rarely, if ever, gives any credit to the Government for this type of assistance?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is correct. He is referring to one of the very first single regeneration budget schemes. The city council is heavily involved in that scheme, which is revitalising an area of inter-war housing and involves £2.2 million and a further £7 million of public sector funds. The total spend will be more than £22 million. That is substance; it is delivering regeneration and other benefits on the ground—it is not merely presentation, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) appears to believe. Norwich city council is pleased with the scheme, and I am glad that it is now co-operating fully, as it should. We shall keep an eye on the situation.

Mr. Garrett: Regardless of this particular scheme, is not the Minister aware that Norwich has suffered most grievously under this Government? It has faced massive cuts in allowable expenditure, it has had to sack people and close valuable recreational and other facilities, and it now faces a further cut of some £3 million. Does not the scheme about which the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) is boasting pale into insignificance when viewed against the long-term damage done by this Government to public services in Norwich?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman believes that the way to achieve economic revitalisation is to allow a council to continue as one of the most extravagant over-spending councils in the country, he will no doubt wish to stick with Norwich council. If, however, he wants to use local authority, Government and private sector money creatively and effectively for real regeneration, he can deliver it through the sort of scheme from which Norwich is now benefiting. Such schemes offer a much higher quality of spend and have the advantage of pulling in significant amounts of private sector investment, which would not be the case in a scheme run solely by the local authority.

Housing

13. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage more local authorities to transfer their housing stock to alternative landlords. [29784]

Mr. Clappison: Our successful voluntary housing transfer programme will continue with help for the poorer estates in the form of the estates renewal challenge fund.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the Conservative group on Wyre borough council, which initiated the scheme that resulted in Wyre borough's entire housing stock being successfully transferred to the Wyre housing association after a successful ballot which revealed that the local Labour party was hopelessly split on the issue?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The group deserves congratulations, because the scheme will benefit tenants in the form of repairs, improvements and rent guarantees. However, it is not only on Wyre borough council that there seems to be a split in the Opposition ranks. Local housing companies offer an important opportunity to attract private finance, but an attack on such companies, in the form of amendments to the Housing Bill, seems to have been mounted by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen in another place—at least, they sought to mount an attack until the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) put them under a curfew. We wait to see whether this is an example of old Labour being put under a curfew alongside 10-year-olds, 16-year-olds or whoever else Labour plans to treat in this way.

Ms Walley: Is the Minister aware that former National Coal Board homes in my constituency were sold to private landlords—to such companies as Banana Bliss—who are now asking tenants to pay rent increases ranging from £28 to £50? Can he justify that? Can he provide us with guarantees on rent control in the light of the Spath Holme court case? What guarantees will there be for tenants of privately rented properties?

Mr. Clappison: There is a rent guarantee in the case of transfers to housing associations or local housing companies, and tenants are aware of the situation. In all cases, the transfer is subject to tenants' approval, and a large majority of tenants—as in the case of Wyre—have given their approval.

Mr. Thurnham: Does the Minister agree that it is deplorable how many council houses are left empty and boarded up? Should not they be sold off to landlords who would make the effort to let them—thereby housing the homeless?

Mr. Clappison: There is a problem with some empty council stock. The performance of some councils, under certain political control, falls well below that of the best performance in other cases. If those councils—some of which are in east London, such as Hackney—could put their houses in order, they could provide housing for many more tenants.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister recall that the Walterton and Elgin tenants in Westminster rightly sought to transfer their homes out of the control of Westminster city council, and that they are now replacing the asbestos-ridden slums of Westminster with decent quality housing for local people? Why are the Government therefore making it impossible for any organisation led by tenants to be registered as an approved social landlord in future? Why are they making impossible the very transfers they supposedly support?

Mr. Clappison: Because, in the type of organisations with which we are concerned, it is very important that no single group, whether the council or tenants, should have such a majority. It is important that tenants should be represented. The hon. Gentleman is aware of the advantages that tenants across the country have taken through tenant management organisation to have a say in the running of their own estates. Those are reforms that we put in place, often opposed by the Labour party.

Regional Government (Yorkshire)

14. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about regional government in Yorkshire. [29785]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside have informed me of their proposals to establish a regional assembly of local councils.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware that the leader of my local, Labour-controlled council of Kirklees has admitted that the proposal to which my hon. Friend has referred is designed to be the forerunner of a full-blown regional assembly in the unlikely and unhappy event of a Labour Government being elected? Does he agree that the very last thing that Yorkshire folk want is more Government regulation, more politicians interfering and a new Labour white rose tax?

Mr. Curry: I note that there is a large number of putative leaders of this regional assembly among Yorkshire Labour leaders. What a local authority decides to do within its existing powers and within its existing budget is entirely up to it. I am entirely opposed to the creation of a new tier of unwanted, unnecessary and bureaucratic local government, which will no doubt demand more power and more money. Such a structure would not create one extra job, educate one more pupil or export one additional item. It would be an utter waste of time, and I hope that such a silly idea will not be pursued.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is it not the case that if there had been regional government in Yorkshire, it would have handled the Yorkshire water crisis a lot better than did the Government?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman is normally very sensible, and many of his suggestions contain a grain of common sense, but this one is inherently implausible.

Mr. Michael Brown: May I tell my hon. Friend that, after spending 17 years in this place trying to get rid of the wretched county of Humberside, and succeeding, the last thing that we want is Humberside—let alone a Greater Yorkshire or Humberside—in the form of regional government?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend. I noted that he celebrated the demise of Humberside, as did the local authorities and people of Yorkshire, who had never found it responsive to their needs. The last thing that anyone wants is a surrogate Humberside under a new name and with even more pretensions.

Westminster City Council

17. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given to local authorities following the publication of Mr. John Magill's inquiry into Westminster city council. [29788]

Mr. Curry: None.

Mr. Ainger: Does that answer mean that the Minister believes that no other local authority in the country would sink to the depths of Westminster city council, which the auditor has found acted unlawfully, through its own wilful misconduct? Does he believe that, by acting as it did, and by removing the prospect of homes from the homeless while costing the ratepayers of Westminster £31.6 million, although the council may not have been acting illegally in his terms, its actions were morally wrong?

Mr. Curry: My answer meant that the problem arose within Westminster city council, that the report was addressed to Westminster city council, and that it is up to Westminster to sort it out.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [29799]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Prentice: Does the Prime Minister agree that Camelot's profits of £1 million a week, and the bonuses of £100,000 being paid to the directors, are simply unacceptable? Why can we not have a non-profit making lottery, as is generally the case in Europe? When shall we start giving money to good causes instead of lining the pockets of fat cats?

The Prime Minister: Camelot's post-tax profits are less than 1p in the pound. Camelot has been extraordinarily successful, and the hon. Gentleman ought to be pleased about that, because his constituency has so far received £1.7 million in grants from the Sports Council, the Arts Council and the National Lottery

Charities Board. The more profitable Camelot is, the more money will be available in grants for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and others.

Mr. David Hunt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although last night's decision on a partial lifting of the beef ban is a welcome move in the right direction, what we need is a clear framework for a total lifting of the ban?

The Prime Minister: I agree. Yesterday's decision was a further step towards getting the ban lifted, and I am grateful to the Commission and to the increased number of member states that gave their support. We now look to the Commission to live up to its responsibilities and, by following normal procedures, lift the ban on beef derivatives. Of course, we seek not only a lifting of the ban on derivatives but a framework for a lifting of the whole ban—a ban that is not scientifically justified.

Mr. Blair: I join the Prime Minister in welcoming the lifting of the ban on derivatives, but is the clear framework for lifting the whole ban that he seeks to achieve before the Florence summit to include a time scale—a time by which the ban is to be lifted?

The Prime Minister: What we seek, what we are discussing with the Commission, and what my right hon. and learned Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are discussing with their colleagues in Europe, is a clear and staged process towards the complete lifting of the beef ban, based on science rather than on the irrational argument that has sustained the ban thus far. We have put our ideas to the Commission, and they are now under negotiation. At this stage, I do not wish to go into the details of the negotiation; I do not believe that it would be productive or in the interests of the beef industry to do so. We are looking for a proper framework that will allow a staged complete lifting of the ban, commencing as speedily as possible.

Mr. Blair: I do not expect the Prime Minister to expose his hand on the precise time scale, but will a time scale be part of the negotiation, or not? Is that to form part of the framework, or not? Obviously the issue is when the ban will be lifted, so if a time scale is not to be part of the negotiation, what is the Prime Minister's expectation? Are we talking about months, the end of the year or a longer time scale?

The Prime Minister: I said that it would be a staged lifting. We are certainly looking for the beginning of the staged lifting at an early date, but it will be dependent on events that are yet to be discussed with the European Union. It would not be in the interests of the agriculture industry for me to go into the details at this stage, although it is tempting. I know that the right hon. Gentleman and I appreciate that we are talking about the livelihoods of 650,000 people who are involved in the beef industry in this country, many more who are involved in the beef industry across Europe and, indeed, the basis of the European internal market. All that has been put at risk by the unjustified action of other member states. We want the ban to be lifted; we are discussing that in detail. As soon as I have more to report to the House, I shall do so.

Mr. Blair: I am not clear whether the time scale is to form part of the negotiation. We know that the cost of just the 30-month cattle slaughter policy is about £2.5 billion over the next few years and that there will be additional costs because of other measures. Will the refunding of that cost—at present only about 25 or 30 per cent. is to be refunded—be part of the clear framework that the right hon. Gentleman is seeking?

The Prime Minister: No. A refunding mechanism for the costs of slaughter has been in place for some time. We are not discussing that matter with the European Union. I am concerned about getting the ban lifted. The ban is not justified and ought to be lifted. On the basis of the science available, what the World Health Organisation has said and the information that we have already made available to our colleagues, there is not in my judgment—or in the judgment of many independent judges—a justification for the ban to continue. I am primarily concerned, as I have said, about the health and future of the British beef industry. That is the matter under negotiation with our European partners.

Mr. Batiste: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the disastrous loss earlier today of the first Ariane 5 space rocket. While it is still too early to be sure of the reasons for that loss, will he take the opportunity to confirm the Government's support for the international collaboration that keeps so many fine British companies at the forefront of international science and technology?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, no one is quite certain what happened in the distressing loss of the Ariane rocket. I have not had the opportunity, in the few minutes since the information came through, to determine precisely the scale of British involvement. My recollection is that our involvement in Ariane 5 is relatively modest, although I think that we sponsored one of the satellites on board which would have been lost. Certainly, whatever may have happened, there is a future for co-operation with our colleagues in Europe on that and other matters.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister's policy of declaring war on Europe has resulted in the partial lifting of a ban that everybody expected to be lifted completely even before the policy was adopted. Is it not perfectly clear that nothing has been achieved by that foolish policy that could not have been achieved without it? The cost to Britain has been lost respect and lost influence abroad, and a campaign by his Back Benchers and the press at home of ugly, petty xenophobia, which insults and demeans us all.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is just being plain silly. No one, as he so absurdly put it, has declared war on Europe. What I said when I announced the policy at this Dispatch Box was that we were not getting the co-operation in discussion on the important issue—important to the right hon. Gentleman's constituents as well as to mine—that we had a right to expect as members of the European Union. If good will is not shown to us, people must not expect us to show it in return. I am determined that the matter be properly and speedily examined so that we may, first, get a lifting of the beef derivatives ban, which now looks probable in the

very short term, and then a framework for a lifting of the complete ban. Exaggerated comments such as the right hon. Gentleman has just made achieve exactly what he accuses my hon. Friends of doing.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on his election as Prime Minister of Israel? Does he agree that, following the recent welcome discussions with Yasser Arafat and, given flexibility, good will and mutual understanding on both sides, there is no reason why the peace process should not continue?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to congratulate Mr. Netanyahu on his election. The United Kingdom has a better relationship with the state of Israel today than at any stage in the history of that state. I know that the new Prime Minister is determined that that will continue, and so am I. Since his election, the Israeli Prime Minister has made it clear publicly that he wants to continue the peace process and to honour the agreements that Israel has already reached. I welcome those objectives. The House may wish to know that I have already been in touch with the new Prime Minister and invited him to the United Kingdom.

Q2. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [29800]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Roche: I am sure that the Prime Minister will share my delight that one of last Saturday's jackpot winners is a resident of Hornsey and Wood Green. Will he encourage Camelot to give a fair share of its profits to good causes? Will he also admit that the Government were wrong to set up the lottery in such a way and that the pay of Camelot directors is another example of taking from the many and giving to the few?

The Prime Minister: Of course I congratulate the hon. Lady's constituent and those bodies within her constituency that have benefited from the lottery. However, perhaps she has forgotten that Camelot was awarded a licence by the regulator because it convinced the regulator that it could deliver the maximum sum of money for good causes. That is the purpose of the lottery and Camelot has achieved it spectacularly well. It also makes substantial donations to charity.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield, I am very proud of the borough of Macclesfield and its achievement in the recent local elections? Will my right hon. Friend accept an invitation from me and the leader of the council, Councillor Mrs. Margaret Duddy, to visit Macclesfield, where he will receive a warm welcome for the principled leadership that he is giving the Government and the Conservative party, and where he will see how a well-run and accountable local authority is warmly and very well supported by its local electorate?

The Prime Minister: From what my hon. Friend tells us, Macclesfield is a example to us all. I certainly would be very happy to visit Macclesfield at an appropriate time, but I hope that my hon. Friend will not pin me down to a date.

Q3. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [29802]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. MacShane: Has the Prime Minister read reports that 77 Republican Congressmen voted to support President Clinton's move significantly to raise the minimum wage in the United States? As America has the best job creation record in the world, why will he not send Treasury Ministers to see their Republican colleagues to learn how a statutory minimum wage goes hand in hand with fair play and good job creation?

The Prime Minister: There are very few similarities between the structure in the United States to create jobs and the policies that those on the Opposition Front Bench advocate, which would destroy jobs. If the hon. Gentleman wants to see job creation, he can see it here in the United Kingdom. He will not see it in those countries nearby that have a minimum wage and adhere to the social chapter.

Q4. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [29803]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my right hon. Friend agree that people who talk tough about fighting crime must understand that we need support measures to act tough? How can any party that opposes our proposals to set up secure training centres for juvenile criminals be taken seriously when talking about curbing juvenile crime?

The Prime Minister: I very much regret that our proposals for dealing with juvenile criminals did not receive the support of the Opposition, and I am sure that the electorate will have noticed it. I suppose that Labour's recent proposals for curfews will be adopted for a short while by some Labour Members, but will be ditched after a decent interval. I am not sure that those proposals are workable, as I believe the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has suggested. I believe that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) has made some more scathing comments about the policy.

Quarantine

3.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision in respect of quarantine.

If asked about our quarantine regulations, the average person is likely to say that quarantine has kept us free from rabies, as such sentiments have become the received truth. The quarantine regulations have assumed the status of a comfort blanket in this country—they are solid and reassuring, rather like cricket and buttered crumpets. Down the years, the image has been created of an animal-loving and rabies-free nation, separated by a few miles of water from a continent seething with half-mad, vicious and slavering animals—and that is only the European Commissioners. Like so much of the jingoistic rubbish that one hears in this country, a critical examination of the situation reveals a different picture.

No live rabies virus has been isolated from the 1.75 million mammals imported into the United Kingdom since 1970, including 200,000 dogs and cats. There were two cases of rabies in imported dogs in 1983 and 1990, but in both cases the dogs had been infected deliberately and neither revealed any clinical symptoms. The only cases of active rabies brought into the United Kingdom during the past 17 years have been carried here by humans.

The defenders of the present system must answer this question—if no cases of rabies have been detected in quarantine in the past 25 years, why are we maintaining a quarantine system? The current policy is not scientifically led—it is based on prejudice and political expediency, and is more like voodoo than science. It is bad enough that the quarantine regulations are outmoded and unnecessary, but they cause genuine suffering to the animals that endure them and to owners forced to put their pets through the ordeal.

In the past 25 years, 170,000 families have put their pets through quarantine. As I have said, there have been no cases of rabies in quarantine during this period, yet 2,500 dogs have died in quarantine—about 10 animals a month. Some die after coming into contact with other animals in the kennels, which can be kept in fairly squalid conditions, while others simply die of loneliness. An animal that is parted from its loving family does not know that it is being put into quarantine, ostensibly for its own good—all it knows is that it has been dumped. It is not surprising that a number of those creatures unfortunately die.

Many die when they come out of quarantine, having picked up something during their incarceration. Judging by the standards of some kennels, that is not surprising. There is no statutory code covering quarantine kennels, but there is a voluntary code. But voluntary codes suffer from being unnecessary for the conscientious and useless for those who are not. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food approves kennels and makes quarterly visits, but it does so to check the security of the kennels and not to check animal welfare. The RSPCA has no right of access to kennels, and it is usually refused permission by the owners when it asks. It is not cheap to board out a pet in a quarantine kennel, since the kennel owners know that the owner has no option. The charges vary enormously—between £250 and £500 a month, or between £1,500 and £3,000 for six months. Conditions in the kennels vary between good and atrocious, and kennel owners vary from the conscientious to the crooked. Little wonder, then, that outside this country our system is regarded as a gulag for animals.

My Bill would institute a statutory code, enforced by the RSPCA, whose officials would be able to enter premises and prosecute on animal welfare grounds when they think necessary.

There is a great deal of disquiet about the United Kingdom's quarantine regulations among pet owners here and abroad, and the pressure for rational change is becoming irresistible. Our Agriculture Select Committee produced a report in 1994 calling for an overhaul of the system. The Committee recognised that there was no sense in maintaining quarantine for pets coming from rabies-free countries, provided that such animals came with vaccination records and other health certificates. That is, in effect, the pet passport system used in rabies-free countries such as Sweden and Norway, both of which have been rabies free for longer than the United Kingdom.

During questions to the Prime Minister today, he rightly called for scientific evidence to be used as the basis for decisions. He said that there was good scientific evidence against a beef ban. But there is also excellent scientific evidence from the European Commission to the effect that the quarantine system in this country is not efficient. A letter from Directorate-General VI states:

"As you know, we have had a high-powered group of scientists who specialise in the rabies field look at the situation and their unanimous report recommends that the vaccination, chipping and testing of dogs and cats is just as good as quarantine for dogs and cats coming from the rest of the European Union . . . As far as we are concerned, that's that, and we have proposed this as a solution to our betters. However, politics have now entered the arena and we all know what happens when politicians don't accept scientific advice."

Both parties are being inconsistent. European Ministers are being inconsistent in the face of scientific advice with regard to the British beef ban; and this country is being inconsistent by maintaining quarantine regulations in the face of the best veterinary and scientific advice coming from the European Commission. Surely both parties should start being consistent.

Other countries have good rabies-free policies and have maintained them with pet passport systems. Australia and New Zealand are obvious examples; Japan is a rabies-free country and has no quarantine system.

The Swedish model offers a basis for advance. If a dog or cat is imported from an EU or European Free Trade Association country there are no quarantine requirements, provided that the animal has an import licence, an appropriate identification mark, a rabies vaccination and an antibody test and is accompanied by a vaccination certificate. For animals from outside such countries, quarantine is still a compulsory requirement. That is the model that the Select Committee recommended, with good scientific advice to back it up, but the Government threw out the recommendations.

I do not understand how we can keep this system and pretend that it really works. On top of the unnecessary cruelty of the system, there is the complete lack of consistency; it applies only to pets, not to animals brought here for sale. They require only the necessary licences and vaccination certificates, just like pet passports. There are

no quarantine requirements for all the cattle moving in and out of this country, or for the horses that do likewise. Yet because these are warm-blooded animals, they are all capable of carrying rabies.

The Government are spending about £700,000 a year on scaring the public while allowing traded animals to come here and move around freely without being subject to quarantine requirements. That is ridiculously inconsistent.

Responsible pet owners ensure that their pets are vaccinated against rabies—and they have to put their pets into quarantine kennels. It does not make sense. The regulations unfairly affect tens of thousands of British citizens who work abroad, including diplomats, those in the armed forces—many of whom are returning to the United Kingdom from Germany and are in a quandary about quarantine—and those employed by British multinationals. The system makes no sense and it needs to be changed. Norway and Sweden have pet passports and they are concerned about rabies. Pet passports should be introduced in this country, and my Bill seeks to amend our quarantine regulations accordingly.

3.39 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I oppose the Bill. Dogs take up much of the time of the House because they are an important issue. Rabies still exists in some parts of Europe. Quarantine is effective and it works. My constituents in Dover are concerned about quarantine: first, they would be in the front line if dogs were able to roam as soon as they landed from ships and, secondly, many would lose their jobs. There are three excellent quarantine kennels in my constituency that employ 50 people directly and probably 50 people indirectly in looking after dogs.

There are between 70 and 80 quarantine kennels throughout the country and they employ some 1,000 people. It is a small but worthwhile industry. The industry is important because the alternative methods of preventing rabies in this country do not necessarily work and cannot be guaranteed. Rabies still exists in parts of Europe. The Agriculture Select Committee's fifth report of 1995 stated:

"Rabies is a horrifying disease and Britain can be rightly thankful and proud of its rabies-free status."

However, rabies exists throughout the world. It is estimated that there are 30,000 cases of rabies each year in India. Although rabies was eradicated in the United Kingdom in 1903, it made a brief reappearance in 1918 and 1922. Indeed, rabid dogs have been kept in quarantine. In 1992, in Europe there were 2,769 confirmed cases of rabies: 2,047 foxes, 126 cats and 90 dogs.

Although the number of rabies cases in the European Union has decreased, it has not yet been eradicated. At the present time, the best hope is for possible eradication by the turn of the century. The eradication of rabies means that more foxes are in existence and, as a consequence, that rabies would be easier to transmit than ever before if there is ever another outbreak in Europe.

Quarantine worked effectively between 1922 and 1969. There were only 27 cases of rabies in quarantine and the dogs were not released from the kennels before they died. Quarantine has worked and it is not unreasonably expensive. The cost of quarantine is paid by the dog owners. If it is a tax in any respect, it hits only the users of the service. If vaccination were used as an alternative to quarantine and if every dog in the country were vaccinated the cost would be enormously high. In addition, it would be almost impossible to police and to carry out.

The alternatives to quarantine do not work. Dogs have to be properly vaccinated before exposure to rabies and we cannot be certain that they will be properly vaccinated every time. Dogs have to satisfy a blood test before having a passport issued to them—if a pet passport is the proposed method. We have to check that that process takes place properly. One cannot be certain that a dog may be conclusively identified from its passport—some dogs, like some people, look alike. Under the passport system, dogs must have residency certificates but their accuracy cannot be guaranteed. The passport system requires owners to act honestly and in a disciplined manner. Owners would also incur additional expense.

In practice, the system would be adhered to only rarely. Many countries do not have reliable systems of enforcement. The House is often concerned that many of the laws passed by Brussels are not enforced properly. The introduction of pet passports, or Euro pet passports, to replace quarantine cannot be guaranteed to work. Only about a third of dogs in this country are licensed by their owners. Therefore, I do not believe that pet passporting would be adopted universally if the system were introduced.

Furthermore, the system may be illegal under European law as its enforcement would require the reintroduction of some form of border control. In Dover we are told perpetually that we cannot have border controls to prevent the smuggling of alcohol and other goods through customs. Therefore, I do not see how such controls could be reintroduced under the pet passport system.

Quarantine is enormously effective. It relies on an efficient licensing system, the proper transportation of animals by approved carriers and the notification of animals' arrival at a port. There is also a six-month observation period. For those reasons, quarantine is very good.

In conclusion, I oppose the Bill on the basis that there is no scientific case for relaxing quarantine. No scientific argument could guarantee that the United Kingdom would remain 100 per cent. rabies free if we were to abolish quarantine and introduce a system of pet passports. Therefore, I believe that the Bill should not be passed by the House.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tony Banks, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Simon Hughes, Ms Diane Abbott, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Alan Meale, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Paul Tyler and Mr. David Mellor.

QUARANTINE

Mr. Tony Banks accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision in respect of quarantine: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July 1996 and to be printed. [Bill 141].

Orders of the Day

Education (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government are firmly committed to the promotion of quality, diversity and choice across the whole of society, and our achievements in the field of education demonstrate the reality of that commitment. Raising standards, reporting to parents, placing requests, assisted places, school boards, the option of self-governing status and many more initiatives show that our record in that field stands squarely behind those aims.

Many, if not most, of the now valued changes to Scottish education introduced by the Government were greeted initially with scepticism, if not hostility. I know that well. I think particularly of the five to 14 programme, national testing and of the Howie report. Many of the ideas that I promoted were said by Opposition Members to be totally unworkable, but those ideas are now accepted as uncontroversial and even embraced as part of the Opposition's programme. The Education (Scotland) Bill will further those ideas even more.

The Bill has benefited from the special procedures introduced by the Government for handling Scottish legislation. As a result of the evidence presented at the Select Committee in Glasgow in March, a number of useful amendments were made to the Bill in Committee in another place.

The Bill is a balanced package of measures, ranging from important improvements to our existing successful policies on school boards and placing requests to the restructuring of the qualifications and assessment arrangements in Scotland and measures that will facilitate the implementation of our policies on pre-school education.

Our commitment to standards underlies our plans for improving qualifications for the over-16 age group. "Higher Still" will deliver a unified curriculum and assessment for that age group from 1998. It will create a coherent, unified qualifications system that incorporates both the academic and vocational strands of learning. It will improve the quality of education available to all students whether they are in school or further education. It will also promote parity of esteem between different branches of learning, enabling Scotland to bridge the academic and vocational divide. That is an objective we share with almost all other western industrial nations, but in Scotland we can soon convert that to reality.

"Higher Still" strengthened the case for creating a unified organisation for assessment and certification. Consultation last year showed strong and widespread support for a new single body to incorporate existing functions and to manage "Higher Still". Part I of the Bill will set up such a body. The Scottish Qualifications Authority, or SQA, will take over the existing functions and assets of the Scottish Examination Board, or SEB, and the Scottish Vocational Education Council—SCOTVEC. It will also administer the "Higher Still" qualifications.

The SQA will build on the high reputations of the existing bodies to improve the quality of Scottish qualifications and enhance their status abroad. It will be responsive to all those who use its services. We are determined to improve the quality and standards in Scottish education. That area is vital to all those involved in education and training, including teachers, students and employers.

I turn now to the provisions in part II. I am delighted to have this opportunity to explain the Government's policy on the expansion of pre-school education in Scotland. Our approach to this initiative is driven by careful forward planning, widespread consultation, and commitment to parent choice, educational quality, diversity of provision and value for money.

The Government's policy of expanding pre-school education has been welcomed throughout Scotland, and the case in principle for more pre-school education is already clear. The benefits to children, first and foremost, as well as to their parents are well recognised and not in dispute.

There were more than 170 responses to the consultation we carried out last autumn. All endorsed the principle of more pre-school provision.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Of the 170 representations made to the Secretary of State, how many endorsed vouchers as a method of expanding nursery education?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman might be patient. He is correct to say that serious reservations were expressed by some of the old Labour interests in Scotland about the principle of giving parents choice. Some people, such as the hon. Gentleman himself, would much prefer a system that dictates to parents rather than allows them to decide for themselves what is appropriate.

Our preparations for full implementation of the voucher initiative will be greatly assisted by a thorough and comprehensive consideration of the operational details. I can announce to the House today that a team from Stirling university has been appointed to carry out the evaluation.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Answer the question.

Mr. Forsyth: I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have appreciated the fact that his alma mater will undertake the task, but I am not sure that he is a great advertisement for its achievements.

Mr. Connarty: As I am a member of the university's governing body, it seems happy to have me—and to report to me every year, as one of the local Members of Parliament. The Secretary of State's disparaging remark was unnecessary. However, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for being so munificent, in placing the evaluation with a university that will be in the Ochil constituency after the next general election, not that of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Forsyth: That is true, but despite the Labour party's gerrymandering, I intend to represent Stirling for

the foreseeable future. I hope that it will not be long before Stirling university is back where it should be—in the Stirling constituency.

Part II will, for the first time, give all parents freedom of choice in pre-school education—a chance for all to gain access to good-quality pre-school education and unparalleled diversity of provision. It will add up to £30 million of new public money each year to perhaps the most vital area of education—that of our youngest children.

In a process beginning this August, parents in North Ayrshire and East Renfrewshire, and in parts of Highland and of Argyll and Bute, will be able to choose where their pre-school children will be educated, confident of their entitlement to vouchers of the value of £1,100. One year later, parents across Scotland will have that choice.

Vouchers are a straightforward and effective way of seeing that services are client led and responsive to individual needs and preferences.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): What advice has the Secretary of State been given by his officials about the voucher system's administrative costs? Is it correct that £200 or £300 out of every £1,100 will be swallowed up by administration costs?

Mr. Forsyth: It would be correct to say that the cost is about 2 per cent.—which is low.

Mr. Worthington *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman might like to consider how much is spent by local authority headquarters before money actually reaches the classroom.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On the subject of one's alma mater, my clear recollection is that the Secretary of State once argued for a voucher system for not just nursery education but primary, secondary and tertiary education. Is that still the right hon. Gentleman's position? If not, when did he stop believing in that policy?

Mr. Forsyth: I have long argued for an extension of parental choice. This may not have happened with the hon. Gentleman but as most of us grow older, we take a more realistic view of the world and combine our idealism with practicality. The sort of idealism for which I spoke in St. Andrews in those days is now embraced throughout the world—we have seen the success of privatisation. The hon. Gentleman and his party find themselves isolated with their rather left-wing views. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the success of a Labour council in Fife in introducing vouchers for people involved in training, which is a form of tertiary education. The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that he has lost the argument on extending parental choice. He no longer has the courage, as he had at St. Andrews, to argue against the vouchers that have been so successful for training in Fife and elsewhere.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As I grow older, I not only take a more realistic view of the world but of how wool can be pulled over the eyes of hon. Members. May we be given, in the wind-up, some actual figures of how much the voucher system will cost? The Department must have notional figures of the cost per voucher. If such a figure is not available, that is a disgrace to the Scottish Education Department.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman can have it in the winding-up speech, but I have just given the House the figure. It is 2 per cent. of the cost. *[Interruption.]* Each voucher is £1,100, and 2 per cent. of £1,100 is £22. I hope that that will satisfy the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall).

As the hon. Member for Linlithgow gets older, he continues to ask important questions. I wish that his friends on the Opposition Front Bench would answer the famous West Lothian question, which is so much a part of the vital debate in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for Dumbarton does not want me to talk about these matters, but they are extremely important in the context of education, because our ability— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that this is nonsense. We have pilots in place. They will be evaluated. Thank goodness we have some Labour and Liberal councils that are prepared to put parental interest and choice before dogma, which is more than I can say for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): My right hon. Friend should welcome the interest from Opposition Members about the administrative costs of providing education at all levels, because it is important that the House examines carefully what the administrative costs were, for example, at local authority level and in the universities and elsewhere. Then we can judge whether they are on to a good thing.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not hear the Opposition complain about the idea of vouchers for skill seekers. Skill-seeker opportunities, which are client led, have transformed the way in which young people make training choices. Why do the Opposition not complain about choice in that area? The voucher mechanism applied to pre-school education will put the real power of choice in the hands of parents, which is where it should be.

Mr. George Robertson: Let us go back to the administrative cost. Perhaps the junior Minister will give the right hon. Gentleman the answer. It is estimated that, in England and Wales, the cost per voucher of administration is £264. How on earth does he expect anybody to take seriously a figure per voucher of £22, which is barely likely to cover the cost of the postage involved in administering the scheme?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should watch my lips. The voucher system will cost £70 million. The administrative costs will be 2 per cent. of that. The figures that he quoted for England have been demolished by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I do not answer for England. If the hon. Gentleman is reduced to scrabbling around with figures that the National Audit Office has discredited, he is in a desperate situation. He should talk to his colleagues in the Labour party who have given the people whom they represent the opportunity of choice in nursery education by introducing a voucher pilot. In Stirling, only the other day someone came to my

[Mr. Forsyth]

surgery, asking, "Why are we not able to get vouchers here?" The answer to that is because the Labour council puts dogma before the interests of parents.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I give way to the hon. Lady, the champion of precisely such dogma.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank the Secretary of State for that recognition.

On idealism giving way to practicality, if the right hon. Gentleman's notional ideal of a voucher system is proved by the pilot schemes to be unworkable and useless, will he give up the idea, or will he still insist on imposing it on parents, who prefer local authority education and have said so clearly?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall do a deal with the hon. Lady. If she will give up all the ideas that are unworkable and useless and which are part of her party's programme, I shall certainly give that commitment, which I would freely give any way. The Government have never been attached to any policies that are unworkable and useless. *[Laughter.]* The rate at which—if I can be heard above the hilarity on the Opposition Front Bench—her party is ditching its own policies, to which she has committed her lifetime in politics supporting, must be of considerable alarm to her.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

In the pilot areas, both providers of pre-school education and parents are showing their enthusiasm for the voucher initiative in a practical way—in a workable way, I must tell the hon. Member for Maryhill. Already, 3,889 voucher application forms have been sent to parents in the pilot areas, and more than 72 per cent. have been returned. Moreover, 71 centres in the voluntary and private sectors have applied to be newly recognised as education providers and admitted into the voucher system. I am sorry that Opposition Members are disappointed by that good news. I expected them to welcome the news from the front that our scheme is working well.

The helpline that handles inquiries from parents and providers has fielded many calls from people all over Scotland wanting information and demanding to know when they will be eligible to receive vouchers.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I listened to the hon. Gentleman on the radio this morning.

Mr. Wallace: I am glad that I had an audience. What answer would the right hon. Gentleman give to a parent in the Western Isles asking for a nursery voucher, when there is no nursery education provision in the Western Isles? How can that parent do anything with that voucher?

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that the House has been listening to what I have been saying. I said that in respect of the pilot schemes, 71 centres in the voluntary and private sectors have applied to be newly recognised. If we give people purchasing power, the market will provide to meet their needs. For those in the Western Isles—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has someone helping him out in his duties. For those in the Western Isles, this is an additional resource over and above what is available to the education authority. It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and the hon. Member for Western Isles oppose a scheme that would give money for nursery education to their constituencies. Does the hon. Member for Western Isles wish to argue against that? No.

Those who understand the great potential benefit of vouchers, such as the Scottish Consumer Council, have been quick to endorse our approach. They realise that vouchers will put real purchasing power into the hands of thousands of parents for the first time. They also understand a very simple truth—that strengthening demand stimulates supply.

In East Renfrewshire, the benefits of the voucher system are already apparent. A partnership involving the public, private and voluntary sectors has been established and is working very well; so well, in fact, that its members are confident that between them they will be able to provide a place for every child in East Renfrewshire in their pre-school year from the start of the voucher system in August for the first time ever—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) is listening. Perhaps it is because she does not know the facts that she continues to oppose the scheme.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): Do not get so upset.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not upset; I am delighted that, for the first time ever, from August there will be a place for every child in East Renfrewshire. The hon. Lady has been going up and down Scotland saying that that could not be achieved. The scheme is working and it is appreciated.

The East Renfrewshire partnership is a shining example of what can be achieved. New places across all sectors are being brought on stream. It is no wonder that parents in East Renfrewshire, and in all the other pilot areas, have so enthusiastically responded to the issue of voucher application forms.

It would be helpful if the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) would today make his views clear. Does he support giving Scotland's parents more power to choose the right pre-school education for their children? The approach taken in another place and in public debate gave us cause to doubt the Opposition's commitment to parents and choice. This is the moment when the hon. Gentleman can repent and make it clear whether he stands by choice and the interests of parents.

It seems that the Opposition believe that choice should be made by public officials rather than by the public. Do they think that people should be told what they should have, rather than choose for themselves? I have to tell the House that I do not believe that it is right that parents should be told what to do by officials. Parents know their children best and understand best what sort of pre-school education they need. This Government stand for choice and for the rights of parents.

Mr. George Robertson: In that case, what about choice? The English system is moving ahead more

quickly so we can test some of the right hon. Gentleman's assertions. Why is it that the Minister with responsibility for schools said in England on 9 January:

"It is impossible to say that every single four-year-old will have a place."

The Department for Education and Employment information pack says that there is

"no cast iron guarantee of a place until new places are introduced in response to parental demand."

Are we saying that a choice will be available for everyone, or will it be the usual Hobson's choice of this Government: whatever the right hon. Gentleman says is the choice?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. Gentleman is having some difficulties these days and has been hiding from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on the tartan tax issue. I did not think that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was hiding in England and I do not know why we are being told about the position in England. This debate is on Scottish education and I have just told the House that in East Renfrewshire, where we have the first pilot, every child will be guaranteed a place. Why is the hon. Gentleman raising these red herrings? The system is up and working. It is successful in Scotland. Labour authorities are piloting it. I asked him to give a commitment to say that he supported choice. I gave way to him and we still await that commitment. He believes that bureaucrats, and not parents, should decide what is good for people.

Mrs. Liddell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I give way to the hon. Lady on one condition: that she tells me whether she supports parents' right to choose.

Mrs. Liddell: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman will advise parents of children in a nursery school that serves East Renfrewshire and that is run by Mrs. Valerie White. Five children from East Renfrewshire are in her nursery school and four of their younger siblings are due to attend the nursery school. Because of inadequate forward planning in trying to get the pilot scheme off the ground before the general election to try to save the seat of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), Mrs. White is about to lose £40,000 a year as the vouchers cannot be applied to her nursery school. What advice would the right hon. Gentleman give to parents of Mrs. White's pupils?

Mr. Forsyth: The advice that I would give Mrs. White is to have nothing to do with the hon. Lady and her party because, for vouchers to be extended beyond the existing boundaries of the pilot schemes, we need another Conservative Government, who will introduce vouchers for the whole of Scotland. If the hon. Lady and her friends ever get into power, there will be no vouchers and we will be back to the position that I had in my constituency surgery on Friday, with a parent telling me that her child had been denied a place because the child's name did not come out of a hat as she was not a single parent.

That is the difference. Labour offers the choice of the lottery of names out of a hat and priority to single parents, whereas we the Conservatives offer choice for all and parents the freedom to choose what is right for their children. The hon. Lady should stop throwing stones, come clean and admit to the House and to the people of Scotland that she is opposed to parents being empowered and given choice in this area.

Mr. Connarty: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I will give way once more to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Connarty: I ask a very simple question. Is the Secretary of State willing to say that he endorses the view of Stirling's nursery provision that he has just described, or is it the belief just of his constituent? Is he saying that Stirling discriminates in favour of single parents and against people who are not?

Mr. Forsyth: Of course I am saying that. I believe that it is called a social strategy.

Mr. Forsyth: That was the position before Stirling council.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman says that that was the position before Stirling. If it has changed, that is the first benefit of the change to single unitary authorities. It was a disgraceful policy. A parent at my surgery on Friday was a victim of that. What does the hon. Gentleman say to a child whose colleagues and friends have a nursery place, but who does not have such a place because his name did not come out of a hat? What happens when he goes to primary school? Under our proposal, every parent with children in the year before—

Mr. Worthington: It is a total disgrace.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree. Under our proposal, every parent will have choice.

Let me spell it out. At a time when government is becoming ever more complex, it is more incumbent on democrats than ever before to remember that the Government exist to serve people, not people to serve the Government. The Opposition do not seem to have grasped the breadth of the voucher initiative. On the contrary, bound up in their concern to fossilise present arrangements, they focus on a narrow set of issues and seek to deny parents the benefit of the expansion in opportunity that our policy would bring. They have concentrated on worrying people with mischievous talk of high costs and poor-quality provision—myths of their own invention. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hamilton is still banging on about how expensive it will be to run. A management company will administer the system at a very low unit cost, with all the economies of scale that national operation offers. Indeed, the cost of issuing and redeeming the vouchers will be less than 2 per cent. of the total voucher programme. When the Opposition hear of the efficiency of the voucher process, they say that it is too complicated for parents. Would the Opposition really have us believe that Scottish parents are incapable of signing an application form and posting it back? It would certainly go with a belief that parents are too inadequate to choose their children's pre-school education. Both beliefs are equally insulting.

[Mr. Forsyth]

My greatest difficulty with what the Opposition have been saying—and, clearly, their greatest difficulty in understanding the nature of the proposals—relates to the quality of provision. It is scaremongering of the worst kind, and the hon. Member for Monklands, East in particular should be ashamed of herself. However, her treatment of this issue is on a par with her other policy initiatives—or lack of them—on education.

Earlier this year, the hon. Lady published a document pretentiously entitled "Every Child is Special: a Compact for Scotland's Future". Hon. Members might regard me as ungallant if I described her document as "empty-headed" and said that it

"showed a paucity of thought",

but they are not my words—they are the criticisms of it by the Educational Institute of Scotland, which should be her natural ally but which quickly discerned how little powder there was in the hon. Lady's compact.

We have made it clear from the very beginning that we are committed to quality. The voucher initiative will introduce for the very first time a system of quality assurance that will apply to all providing centres, whether they are from the public, private or voluntary sectors. The voucher initiative will represent the first ever comprehensive assurance of quality in respect of all pre-school education provision. We have no interest in subsidising poor-quality provision.

Non-school centres will have to complete an initial quality test to the satisfaction of the inspectorate before being admitted to the system. All centres will be subject to regular and rigorous inspection by HMI of the quality of education they provide. These measures will give parents a guarantee of quality in respect of any centre participating in the voucher initiative.

Mr. Worthington *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I have been very generous in giving way. Oh, very well; I give way.

Mr. Worthington: I greatly appreciate the Secretary of State's generosity. As there is to be an important quality assurance, will he tell us how many of the inspectorate will be involved—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps it would be easier if the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), gave him the answer. How many of the inspectorate will be involved in quality assurance before the voucher scheme gets under way?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman asked my hon. Friend to give him the answer, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will do so when he winds up. However, the answer is that we shall be recruiting two new people—[HON. MEMBERS: "Two?"]—to supplement the existing considerable resources of the inspectorate for this purpose. All centres will be subject to regular and rigorous—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members sit there mocking, but they are quite happy to have Labour councils running nursery provision which is not subject to inspection at all—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Hon. Members will have to get their facts right. If they think that there is going to be a problem with inspection because of the additional nurseries that are not in the local authority sector, that is hardly consistent with their arguments that problems will arise as a result of the nursery voucher scheme. They should stop making up the criticisms as they go along.

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman has touched on quality. The profile of education provision, which I think has been sent to all those registering, contains the suggestion—indeed, it is a requirement—that they consider the guidance and good practice set out for children with special educational needs. I am sure that we all agree that that is important. Does the Secretary of State accept that the amount of the voucher may have to be greater for children with special educational needs if adequate provision is to be made?

Mr. Forsyth: It is an important matter although no one has yet argued that case in the pilot schemes. However, I am prepared to consider the matter in the light of our experience with the pilots. There are arguments to be made for both sides, including that of stigmatising children with particular learning needs. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the matter, which I shall examine closely in the light of our experience with the pilot schemes.

It is not concern over quality that agitates Opposition Members, it is concern over choice. Choice is anathema to them. Labour writhes in discomfort every time anyone makes a personal choice in any sphere of life instead of abdicating decision-making to the State.

We are also putting effort into developing more fully the curriculum for children in their pre-school year. We will be consulting on that matter shortly.

Today I can also tell the House that I am committing £400,000 over two years to pre-five development officers. Their job will be to support the pre-five initiative and, in particular, to help providers in the voluntary and private sectors to achieve required quality standards. During the pilot year, and in the light of experience, I shall also be considering the need for further action on staff training and qualifications.

I turn now to part III of the Bill, clauses 28 to 31, with schedule 4, which amend the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988. School boards represent a successful partnership between parents, teachers and the wider community. They work well in the interests of their schools and of the pupils who attend them. In their short existence since 1989, school boards have become an established and successful part of our education system.

We want to build on that success. I am delighted to say that the legislation generally works well, but this Bill brings in a number of useful improvements in the light of practical experience and after wide consultation.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I know that the Secretary of State sees a rosy picture when looking at how school boards are working. He talks about parental choice, but may I remind him that parents are voting with their feet and that school boards are not being formed—even at his former school, Arbroath high school? School boards do not exist in those schools because parents do not agree with his philosophy, and they did not want his policy in the first place.

Mr. Forsyth: My philosophy is that parents have choice. If they do not want to have a school board, they

do not have a school board. But the vast majority of schools have a school board, and school boards have been very successful. It is extraordinary for a party that argues for self-determination to have a policy against self-determination in schools. Apparently there should be self-determination only at a country level.

The Bill simplifies electoral procedures, makes it easier for parents to join a school board and generally tidies up provisions.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way; as he said, he has been generous. In his criticism of Opposition Members and of our position on school boards, he said that we are against the devolution of responsibility to school boards. Is not he risking having his integrity called into doubt by criticising Opposition Members for wanting to devolve power to the people of Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not criticise the people of Scotland for anything. If the people of Scotland want to vote for independence or for a tax-raising parliament that would destroy the Union, they are entitled to do so. It is my job to warn them of the dangers. I am glad that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has come into the Chamber, because I understand that some of those arguments are finding some force and are being embraced in certain sections and at senior levels of the Labour party. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has been placed in a very unfortunate position, and I hope that the hon. Member for Garscadden will come to his rescue on that matter.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Are not the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) absolutely wrong? The devolved assembly to which he referred would suck up all the responsibilities that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying to pass down to local authorities and to parents, through school boards.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that such a parliament would do anything but put up taxes and do a lot of talking. If we are not going to have the tartan tax—which the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) expressed concern about this morning on the radio; it is the first time that I have heard a politician complaining in an interview that it might not be possible to raise extra taxes, and that that was a matter of alarm for the Scottish people—that parliament will only be a glorified wind machine.

I turn now to part IV. Clause 32 amends the placing request provision in section 28A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The placing request system enables parents as of right to choose their children's school. For our schools and our country to be successful, schools must be sensitive to the needs of children, they must be responsive to the wishes of parents and they must provide their pupils with the skills and knowledge that industry and commerce require.

Parental choice is a catalyst in schools achieving those goals and helps parents to fulfil their aspirations for their children. Since the legislation on placing requests was introduced in 1981, the policy has been extremely successful. We want that success to continue, and will do nothing to detract from the underlying principle that parental choice should be maximised.

Currently, places may not be reserved for children who are likely to move into the area served by a school after the usual cut-off date for decisions on admissions. That has caused problems, as I know well from experience in my own constituency with the very successful Balfron high school.

Under clause 32, a local authority will in certain circumstances be able to refuse a placing request for a child living outwith the catchment area of a school if accepting the request would prevent it from retaining places for incomers to the catchment area.

An authority will be able to retain only places that would reasonably be required to accommodate incomers, and will be able to do so only where there is no other equivalent school under its management within reasonable walking distance of the school for which the placing request has been made. We shall also have the long-stop power of prescribing the maximum number of places that may be retained. The change to the current rules has been tightly drawn to ensure that the placing request system continues to maximise parental choice.

The Bill will undoubtedly improve quality and choice. Those are the key themes in the Government's overall programme, and we are determined to pursue all avenues to improve quality and choice. I therefore announce today that I intend to take the opportunity presented by the Bill to extend the existing power to regulate testing, which at present applies only to primary schools, to secondary schools, so that pupils in S1 and S2 and their parents can benefit from the advantages of national testing as quickly as possible.

National testing in Scotland is the regular and systematic appraisal of pupils' progress in the light of nationally agreed standards in reading, writing and mathematics. It is an integral part of the five-to-14 programme, and provides vital information for teachers and parents. The system is now well established in primary schools, to the benefit of teachers, parents and pupils alike.

Unfortunately, once a pupil moves to secondary school the system breaks down, because some authorities and schools do not consider that they need to carry out their responsibilities in that respect. As a result, parents can no longer count on receiving information on the progress of their children as they have come to expect, teachers no longer have the opportunity to confirm their assessment of the level attained by each child, and no one has the evidence to evaluate how successful teaching and learning has been in adding educational value to a pupil's experience in the important first two years of secondary school.

In the first six months of last year, no child in a secondary school in Tayside was tested in mathematics, reading or writing; only 1 per cent. were tested in reading in Lothian, and only 1 per cent. in maths in Grampian. Indeed, in the whole of Scotland only 6 per cent. of pupils were tested in mathematics and reading, and only 4 per cent. in writing. That is completely unacceptable.

The appalling lack of progress in introducing national testing in secondary schools has made it imperative that action be taken immediately. I therefore intend to introduce amendments in Committee to require external testing in mathematics, reading and writing. That will allow competence in those subjects at S1 and S2 to be established. I shall consult shortly on the details.

[Mr. Forsyth]

It is time to put testing into perspective. For too long the hysterical opposition of doctrinaire egalitarians has created a bogey out of that most natural and essential educational procedure, the objective assessment of a child's abilities and progress. Even parents have been brainwashed into imagining that testing is sinister. To attempt to educate a pupil without testing is as absurd as running a business without keeping accounts.

Mr. Welsh: Surely the Secretary of State cannot pretend that parents do not already know how their children are progressing educationally. With all the parent-teacher meetings and constant assessment, parents know exactly how their children are progressing. The right hon. Gentleman says that he wants choice, but it appears that the only choice is to be, "You'll take what the Government give you." If he really wants choice for parents, why does he not ask them whether they want testing? Why does he not ask the professionals in education? Parents know how their children are progressing, and they certainly do not want to return to some of the worst aspects of past systems.

Mr. Forsyth: As I said, we have to put up with a certain amount of hysteria, and we have just heard some of that from the hon. Gentleman. The fact of the matter is that all parents want to ensure that their children are given the best opportunities in school. Testing enables difficulties to be identified at an early stage and remedial action to be taken. That is why we are determined to introduce a system for national testing.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): The Minister has just been emphasising the value that he places on choice. If it is the choice of the parents of the pupils that he has been describing that their children should not be submitted to testing, will that choice be given effect?

Mr. Forsyth: We are proposing a national system of testing that will be externally applied. Whether parents are not prepared to allow their children to take part in the testing is of course a matter for them. I am determined that in every school in Scotland there should be an opportunity for children to be tested. *[Interruption.]* Is it not amazing? We hear from the Leader of the Opposition and from Opposition spokesmen in England how the Labour party believes in testing and that we must have objective standards. Yet whenever we announce such a measure for north of the border, Labour Members make it clear that old Labour is alive and kicking. There is a belief in the Labour party and among Liberal Democrats north of the border, and indeed in the Scottish National party, that objective standards should not be applied.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): We are asking not about ideology but precision of language. If we on the Opposition Front Bench heard the Minister correctly in his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), he said that testing will not be compulsory. Is that correct?

Mr. Forsyth: It will be a matter of statute that the tests will have to be applied in Scotland's schools. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) asked about parents who felt that their children should not sit the tests, just as there are parents who feel that their children should not sit standard grades or highers. There is always the option not to do so, but that would obviously not be in the child's interest. I would have thought that that was perfectly clear. Will the hon. Member for Hamilton tell me whether the Labour party welcomes the opportunity for testing in Scotland's schools, in line with the rhetoric that we have heard from Labour Members? I would happily give way. There he sits; this is the modern Labour party, all rhetoric—

Mr. George Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way.

Mr. Robertson: What is the Secretary of State proposing? He has told us about amendments that are not being tabled today. Is he proposing voluntary compulsory testing or compulsory voluntary testing? He was run out of Scotland the last time he tried this game because Scottish parents do not want the sort of testing about which he is talking to be imposed on the system.

Mr. Forsyth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robertson: He was drummed out of Scotland. On an earlier occasion, an accommodation was reached on testing in Scottish schools to which his successor agreed. That has stood the test of time. Will there be voluntary compulsory testing or will a system be imposed irrespective of parents' wishes?

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman thinks that only 6 per cent. of children being tested in secondary schools in Scotland shows that the system has stood the test of time. He has a nerve to lecture me on the success of our education policies. I ask him to read the Leader of the Opposition's speeches and what his party's education spokesman has to say about testing. We have won the argument on testing and it is high time that the hon. Member for Hamilton stopped pretending that it is possible to argue that parents should have objective assessments of their children's standards of attainment south of the border, but that somehow in Scotland they should not. He is in hock to the Educational Institute of Scotland and the teaching unions that dictate his party's policy on such matters.

The hon. Member for Hamilton knows perfectly well what I have said. Tests will be organised externally by the Scottish Qualifications Authority which all children in Scotland will be required to sit. The tests will be marked externally and the results will be reported to the parents. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East asked a straight question on whether we would insist that children whose parents did not wish them to take the tests would have to do so, and I answered him fairly and squarely that we would not.

Mr. Dalyell: What figures does the Minister have for the external marking of S1 and S2 testing? How much will it cost?

Mr. Forsyth: That will depend on the nature of the tests and the way in which they are implemented. I shall

be consulting on that and I should be grateful for any advice from the hon. Gentleman. However, the costs of not identifying children who have difficulties with the three Rs and addressing those difficulties at an early stage are too high for any society to pay. That is why we are determined to tackle the problem.

The Opposition's education policy is second only to their devolution policy in disarray, impracticality and contradictions. There have been seven reforming Education Acts since 1979—expanding parental choice and diversity of provision. Labour voted against them all.

The Opposition's record in Government was appalling. Under the last Labour Government, spending on education fell by £1.6 billion and spending on universities fell by 12.6 per cent.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am becoming increasingly curious about the following matter. Throughout his speech, the Secretary of State was understandably relying on copious notes. Of course, he is perfectly entitled to all the advice of his civil servants, but he was obviously using those copious notes to make tendentious remarks about Labour party policy. Is it in order for the Secretary of State to use Scottish Office civil servants to produce such a script? If he said that it was produced by central office or his own resources, that would be quite acceptable. I asked about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I have been rather tolerant with the hon. Gentleman. It was fairly obvious from the earlier part of his intervention that his point of order was not a matter for the Chair, and it did not get any better as he continued.

Mr. Forsyth: Given his close association with the last Labour Government, I understand why the hon. Gentleman should find it painful for me to read out their record in education. As he interrupted me, I shall repeat those points for his benefit.

Under the last Labour Government, spending on education fell by £1.6 billion and spending on universities, which are dear to the hon. Gentleman's heart, fell by 12.6 per cent. in real terms. The number of full-time students in higher education fell and teachers' pay rose by just 6 per cent. in real terms—just one fifth of the increase under the present Government.

Today, Opposition Members are totally incoherent on education issues, as was witnessed by their response on testing, to which they keep telling us their party is committed. They want to abolish child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education, or at least the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) wants to do that, but he is not very well informed. He claimed that 80 per cent. of the children of unskilled parents leave school at 16. That was true back in the dark ages of the last Labour Government. Today, thanks to the policy of the present Government, fewer than half the children of unskilled parents leave school at 16. However, the hon. Gentleman's blunder could be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If he came to power and abolished child benefit, those children would leave education prematurely as they did in the bad old days. What passes for Labour education policy is scribbled on the back of an envelope.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that all this guff should have been written by Scottish Office civil servants?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is vastly experienced in the House. He knows full well that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Forsyth: To describe the record of the last Labour Government as guff is astonishing—even for the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) wants to give teachers a sabbatical year out of the classroom. The cost of that would be £4.96 billion. He recently commended traditional methods in education. I agree. Let me remind the House what those methods are: discipline, setting and, above all, testing. It really is time for Opposition Members to give the soundbites a rest and engage in some hard thinking.

One of the greatest Conservative Prime Ministers memorably said that the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity. That is still the belief of Conservatives in Government. We know that there is no more important responsibility than moulding the values and skills of the new generations. But we do not assume that we should arrogate to ourselves that vital task—it is primarily the responsibility of parents and, secondarily, of teachers. The Government have a duty to provide the environment and the resources, but the important decisions belong in the family. Our role is empowerment, and that is the enlightened path that education globally will take in the new millennium.

For the generation of Scots who will inherit that millennium, the Bill is a further enabling measure. It is about quality, diversity and choice—themes at the heart of everything we do in education. The establishment of the Scottish Qualifications Authority will improve quality and promote parity of esteem in the later stages of school and beyond. My announcement today about tests in S1 and S2 will improve standards in the earlier age group. Choice and diversity are at the heart of the pre-school vouchers initiative. The amendments to the legislation on school boards will simplify and improve the way in which boards work. The amendments on placing requests will ensure that children can secure a place at a local school.

I commend the Bill to the House.

4.40 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Education (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* because it makes provision to implement the introduction of nursery vouchers for Scottish nursery education, an innovation which is educationally unsound, administratively wasteful and socially divisive."

The Secretary of State's extremely long-winded speech—lasting more than 50 minutes—showed that the Bill is about nursery vouchers. It does not really say that, of course, but pretends to deal with largely uncontroversial and consensual Scottish issues, including

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the introduction of the new Scottish Qualifications Authority—another quango, with three quarters of its places in the sole gift of the Secretary of State.

The Bill tinkers with the school boards system, making changes that are almost as irrelevant as the boards themselves. It introduces a change in the law on placing requests, in a vain attempt to help the Secretary of State get re-elected in Stirling. The fact is, however, that, although vouchers are referred to in only 16 words in the long title of the Bill and five clauses within it, the Bill is about the introduction of yet another failed, discredited and doomed ideological experiment into Scottish education.

We came to the House today to listen to the Second Reading of the Education (Scotland) Bill, but we have been told that a major feature of the legislation is to be introduced without notice and without the House being told in advance anything about the Government's intentions. We are seeing the return of the failed policies of the former Minister of State, Scottish Office, including compulsory testing—except, thanks to his apparent confusion, it is to be compulsory, semi-voluntary testing.

That is precisely what the right hon. Gentleman said the last time he attempted to introduce such measures into the Scottish education system. This time, however, his approach is incoherent, irrelevant, spur-of-the-moment, ill-thought-out and uncosted—on top of all the other problems he experienced last time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Why does Labour think that testing in schools in England is right, but testing in schools in Scotland is not?

Mr. Robertson: As the Secretary of State keeps telling me, the system in England is different from the system in Scotland. After his failed attempt to impose testing last time, an agreement was reached that was satisfactory to the Scottish Office, teachers and parents. Let me remind the Secretary of State where he went wrong last time, and where he fell foul of public and Conservative party opinion in Scotland.

What brought about the right hon. Gentleman's downfall then was not a campaign by the teaching unions or by the intelligentsia in Scotland against testing, but a boycott by parents—the very parents he now says should have the choice. They brought him down and almost terminally affected his political career. *[Interruption.]* He has been resurrected, and that is why he is back with the same old rubbish. He thinks that he will get away with it as he is now in the Cabinet, but he will not.

Mr. Forsyth: I asked the hon. Gentleman a question that was not difficult, and he ought to answer it. If it is Labour's policy that there should be testing in England to ensure that parents get reports on the standards of achievement in schools, why should parents in Scotland not have that choice? Is it not true that the hon. Gentleman is terrified of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and that the teaching unions are deciding Labour's policy?

Mr. Robertson: I remind the Secretary of State again that a parental boycott killed compulsory testing last time. Scottish education now has a reasonable way in which assessment of performance can be made without the rigidities of the system that he wanted to bring in at that time. In the English system—which, after all, is entirely different from the Scottish system—it may be appropriate to go down the road of national testing in the form that my colleagues have suggested. But nobody in Scotland wants it, and nobody wanted it last time.

However, the Secretary of State will now—by law—impose it on the very parents he claims are supposed to have the ultimate choice in education. The Secretary of State will get another bloody nose. He is coming back with the same old ideas, and he will get the same message from the Scottish people—they do not want this failed experiment, despite his belief that he has all the levers of power in his hands.

Another remarkable feature of today's debate is that the Secretary of State was not supposed to make the opening speech. Until this morning, the Minister for Education, Housing and Fisheries was set to launch the flagship of the Conservative party's education policy in the House. Why was the junior Minister replaced at the last minute? Why did the Secretary of State not want to introduce the Bill? I have a theory—I believe that the Secretary of State is ashamed of the vouchers policy, because he knows that nobody in Scotland wants it. That is why he did not want to be here for the Second Reading of what he considers to be one of the most important Bills that the Government have introduced.

The Government received 170 responses to their consultation, according to the Secretary of State. When asked how many of those responses endorsed the idea of vouchers, he dodged the question. Only one conclusion can be drawn from that—the number of people who endorsed the principle of vouchers was so derisory that he felt it impossible to admit it to the House of Commons. Hardly a soul in Scotland supports the proposal. Local councils, Children in Scotland, the Scottish Pre-School Play Association, trade unions and individuals across Scotland are opposed to the supermarketing of early years education.

The Secretary of State may be ashamed of something else. At the Grand Committee in Stirling on 29 January, he said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell):

> "The Bill's provisions are about ensuring proper standards of inspection, which she and her colleagues have been telling people would not be included."

But the Bill does not state that at all, and simply adds a little to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Secretary of State continued:

> "The Bill will ensure the standards that she is misleading the country about."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 29 January 1996; c. 14.]

The Bill says nothing about the standards that will be laid down.

I wish to draw the House's attention to a matter of some interest. At the end of the debate in Stirling—when he had run out of time because of the abuse he was hurling at the Opposition—the Minister for Education, Housing and Fisheries chose to announce that he was to issue a document on quality assurance. That document is not on the Table of the House today. The Secretary of State said that the Bill includes certain provisions, but it does not. They are included in another document on quality

assurance. That document is not here today, as it should be as we consider a Bill that relates to the provisions for nursery vouchers in Scotland. I wonder why that can be.

Perhaps the Secretary of State thought that, in all honour, he would have to apologise for what he said in Stirling, because the provisions on protection and standards are not in the Bill. Perhaps it would be easier for him to stay well below the parapet rather than make such an apology. So be it. If he does not apologise, people will read the record and make up their own mind.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman has used the word "confusion", and I must admit that I am a little confused. He initially complained about the setting up of a quango, but he fails to realise that by setting up one quango, we are demolishing two, so a gain is made. He also suggested that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State chickened out of addressing the issue of nursery vouchers today, but the hon. Gentleman complained about the length of time that my right hon. Friend took to advocate nursery vouchers. Is there not something wrong with the hon. Gentleman's argument?

Mr. Robertson: I shall take a couple of seconds to clarify the hon. Gentleman's mind—a difficult enough task at any time. First, I did not attack the creation of a quango. We are in favour of a Scottish Qualifications Authority. I simply made the point that three quarters of the places on that new quango will be in the sole gift of the Secretary of State for Scotland—unlike the old Scottish Examinations Board, which included a fair representation from the various constituencies involved in the examination boards. That should have been the model for the new authority.

Secondly, I did not accuse the Secretary of State of being chicken. He was the one who made a huge fuss about my not speaking in the Grand Committee debate in Stirling. I made the point that, until lunchtime today, we had been authoritatively told that the junior Minister would open the debate on this flagship Bill. Indeed, I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State came here and has attempted to defend his policies.

The Secretary of State can hide behind his tartan soundbites, but these ideological transplants, such as the voucher scheme, offer compelling evidence of the sort that will eventually send him and the Government packing from power. What is the Government's real agenda? It is certainly not nursery education—

Mr. Forsyth: I have just been perusing the Bill—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has not had an opportunity to do so yet—to find the relevant words, since the hon. Gentleman has accused me of misleading the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) in respect of powers of inspection. He will find them in schedule 5(2) to the Bill.

Mr. Robertson: That just refers to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Secretary of State, I must remind him, told the Grand Committee:

"The Bill will ensure the standards that she is misleading the country about."

The right hon. Gentleman was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East at the time. The standards are not specified in the Bill; they will be specified by order, and they were outlined in a document on quality assurance that was thrown to the press at the end of the debate in question.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. If he reads schedule 5 carefully, he will see that it is an amendment to the 1980 Act, inserting a paragraph which enables inspections to be made by Her Majesty's inspectors on behalf of the Secretary of State to ensure that standards are maintained. That is the provision to which I referred in Stirling.

Mr. Robertson: Let me read it again slowly, so that the Secretary of State can understand what he said in January:

"The Bill will ensure the standards that she is misleading the country about."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 29 January 1996; c. 14.]

Schedule 5 merely gives the Secretary of State the power to cause inspections to be made. It is not about any standards that may be required.

So it is clear that standards for public inspection are not included. The Minister has merely given himself a blanket power—

Mr. Forsyth: It is true that we are taking a power to get the inspectorate to inspect nursery providers. When this Government take powers, they intend to use them. We do not take power only so as not to use it. We are taking the power to hold inspections because we are going to do just that—it is just like the tartan tax in that respect.

Mr. Robertson: So that is what the Secretary of State means by compulsory voluntary testing, is it? He is saying that he will produce legislation that will introduce testing to secondary education, but that parents who do not want that can opt out of it. Will a statutory obligation be included? The right hon. Gentleman says that the Government do not take powers unless they intend to use them. In that case, will parents be forced to have their children take the tests?

Mr. Forsyth: No, they will not be so forced—but they will not be in a position in which local authorities make no provision for testing, either. There will be a nationally organised programme of testing. Children will be able to participate in it, and parents who want national, objective assessments of their children's skills in the three Rs will be able to have them done, just as they can get information about standards.

I find the hon. Gentleman's position amazing. He is against externally marked tests for S1 and S2, but in favour of standard grade and, presumably, of highers. What is the difference? He seems to be putting dogma before the interests of pupils and their parents.

There is no question of compulsion, but the opportunity will be given, and there will be a national system. If the hon. Gentleman were true to the principles of new Labour, he would endorse that.

Mr. Robertson: So there will be no compulsion. Remarkably, people can pick and choose with this system of compulsory voluntary testing. Again, I remind the Secretary of State that last time it was the parents who brought about the downfall of his scheme—not teachers

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or education authorities. And it is the parents who will ultimately decide whether his ideological experiments work or not.

Mr. Forsyth: It is important to be quite clear about this. Why is the hon. Gentleman making such a meal of it? No one is compelled to take standard grades, which are organised nationally. This is an external assessment of ability. So why is the hon. Gentleman against the idea?

Mr. Robertson: We know nothing about the costing or the administration of the scheme. The Secretary of State has now returned to the old qualifying examinations: the standard grade and the highers. On the one hand, he is offering these voluntary compulsory tests; on the other, he compares them with examinations that result in qualifications for those who pass. I do not think that he has thought the matter through. When told at lunchtime today that he would have to speak to the Bill, he decided, on a whim, to go for the failed old experiment for which he virtually fell on his sword last time. He will not get away with it this time, either—

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I have given way generously, almost to the point of abusing the House's procedures, but I may give way to the hon. Gentleman later, as he perhaps represents a different strain of Conservatism.

All this certainly has nothing to do with nursery education. The right hon. Gentleman's mentor, Baroness Thatcher, said a long time ago that she was in favour of nursery education, but in her 11 years as Prime Minister she did nothing about it. Then came the memorable words of the political adviser to the current Secretary of State for Scotland, who wrote an article on 4 June last year—

Mr. Wallace: Today is the anniversary of the article.

Mr. Robertson: On this very day a year ago, Mr. Gerald Warner, yet another failed Tory candidate for Hamilton, penned an article that deserves to be read to the House in its entirety. I, however, will quote only a small part of it. Under the title "Sick Trustees of Posterity", he wrote:

"Now the Tories are committing themselves to further expansion of nursery education. It is a longstanding obsession with them: Margaret Thatcher pursued the same unholy grail, as education minister, in the early 1970s . . . presumably their calculation is that it will attract votes from working mothers. Such opportunism ignores the chilling reality that every incentive luring mothers out of the home is an investment in Armageddon".

The peroration to this remarkable article deserves a hearing:

"We have heard much about the problems of our underclass. These are real and must be addressed; but they are less daunting than the threat to the social order posed by a rising generation of affluent, ill-educated, spiritually dead and amoral androids. In Rutter and Smith's report we have seen the future and it does not work."

This is the man who pens the speeches of the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—the man who ghosts the right hon. Gentleman's soundbites. This is the man whose views are repudiated in public. He is cossetted to the tune of £40,000 a year of public money. Perhaps he is expressing the Government's secret agenda.

The Bill is not about nursery education. Over the past 17 years, the Government have done nothing to suggest that they give a damn about early age education. What is going on? What is the hidden agenda of school vouchers? It is quite simple: next there will be vouchers for primary, secondary and, ultimately, higher education. The Government desperately want to extend the market place into what is, for them, real education. They will do it if they can get away with it.

I ask the Secretary of State for Scotland unreservedly to state today that he rejects the idea of primary school vouchers. Will he repudiate secondary school vouchers? Will he, without any ambiguity, disclaim any idea of university or higher education vouchers either now or in the future? Would the Secretary of State like to give the House these assurances?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, a review of higher education is currently under way, and I understood that the Labour party was prepared to look at all options. I read a report in *The Guardian* that said that elements within the Labour party are advocating vouchers in the areas of higher and further education. Would the hon. Gentleman like to say something about the Labour party's attitude on vouchers in higher education?

Mr. Robertson: The Secretary of State should not believe everything he reads in *The Guardian*. He did not answer my questions. I asked him specific questions: will he give an assurance that the Government will not introduce primary and secondary school vouchers now or in the future? Yes or no?

Mr. Forsyth: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government have no plans to introduce vouchers beyond nursery provision in the Bill.

Mr. Robertson: There is the answer—and we knew it all along. The Secretary of State appeared before the Scottish Grand Committee on 29 January, in his own constituency, and he was asked about this. He said:

"The Government's policy is absolutely clear—we want to build on our previous success with vouchers for training. We hold the odd belief"—

that is not the only odd belief—

"that people know better than politicians and are entitled to choice."

When the Secretary of State was under pressure, he remembered that he was in the Cabinet and not in a cupboard at the Adam Smith Institute, so he lamely said:

"It is not the Government's policy to introduce vouchers into higher education. My policy is the Government's policy"—

just in case we thought that he actually agreed with it.

People know what the nursery education vouchers system is all about: it is the Trojan horse for the failed experiments of the Thatcherite 1980s—the universal school voucher system bringing the street market into the classrooms of Britain.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I will give the Under-Secretary a chance, because he has been denied the opportunity to make a big speech.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is ranting against vouchers. What does he say to his right

hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who, when asked on "A Week in Politics" on Channel 4 on 8 July last year whether he would get rid of the voucher system when he was in power, said:

"No; if it is in place you have to work with the system when you take over"?

Mr. George Robertson: Of course one has to work with the system that one takes over. The voucher system will not be in place in Scotland, and we will get rid of it elsewhere as quickly as we can, for reasons that I will outline. It is unsound educationally, it is an administrative nightmare, and it is a costly way of providing nursery education. The Labour party is committed to the proper provision of nursery education and to giving people a real choice.

The Secretary of State should look at the history of education vouchers. In 1984, before the right hon. Member came into the House of Commons, Sir Keith Joseph—whom I found to be an engaging, if not a slightly loopy, gentleman—signed the obituary of the voucher system. On 22 June 1984, Sir Keith Joseph said:

"I was intellectually attracted to the idea of education vouchers because it seemed to offer the possibility of some kind of market mechanism which would increase the choice and diversity of schools".

He continued:

"In the course of my examination of this possibility, it became clear that there would be great practical difficulties in making any voucher system compatible with the requirements that schooling should be available to all without charge, compulsory and of an acceptable standard."

He was a wise man who was speaking wise words, at a time when he and Margaret Thatcher were not convinced that vouchers could work. He said:

"For these reasons, the idea of vouchers is no longer on the agenda."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 290.]

Sir Keith Joseph was not the only person to hold that view: the Secretary of State was a signatory to the pamphlet entitled "Save Our Schools", issued by the No Turning Back group. The pamphlet explored the idea of nursery vouchers, and stated:

"The voucher system has been widely canvassed as a means of bringing parental choice into education, and has very many excellent features, but some drawbacks. The economic theory which underlies it is admirable, but it has serious political weaknesses."

Those are not my words, nor the words of the Labour party, nor the words of any left-wing ideologist—those are the words of the right-wing vanguard of the Conservative party.

The pamphlet continued:

"Experiments have been proposed, studies undertaken. Not even the combination of a sympathetic Secretary of State and an enthusiastic Under-Secretary succeeded in getting the idea off the ground."

The pamphlet discussed the idea of piloting—we have heard a lot about this from the Secretary of State this afternoon. It stated:

"It is difficult to allay fears by an experiment with vouchers. By confining vouchers to a particular area, genuine choice is denied and little idea given of what the national implications would be."

Perhaps, when the Secretary of State refers to tiny East Renfrewshire, he will bear in mind the conclusions of the pamphlet—written when he was younger and a hell of a lot wiser.

As the Secretary of State said during his speech, nursery education is critical to the development of a child. Half a child's education development is believed to take place in the first five years of life. All recent research shows that pre-school education is positive, aids behaviour and performance, compensates for disadvantage, reduces delinquency and allows help for those with special needs at the earliest possible moment. That is why the Labour party is committed to providing nursery places for all three-year-olds and all four-year-olds whose parents want it.

Existing local authority provision is simple and cost-effective. It allows choice, it is easily accessible and it is easily understood by parents. The model of inclusive co-operation between the state, voluntary and other sectors has proved successful in practice. It needs to be expanded, and it does not need nursery vouchers.

According to all the evidence and the vast majority of the views submitted to the Government in a consultation exercise that they undertook but have chosen to reject, vouchers for nursery education will be costly and wasteful to run, immensely bureaucratic to administer, and will endanger existing provision to three-year-olds and to those with special educational needs. Vouchers will drag down standards and restrict or eliminate choice for those in rural and remote areas of Scotland. The Government know this only too well, but the ideological steamroller drives on, just like the poll tax did so devastatingly only a few years ago.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that I have a large rural constituency. I trust that he will also acknowledge that in my constituency there is a demand for nursery education. My constituents would be happy to take part in a pilot scheme if they were given the opportunity.

Mr. Robertson: People in the hon. Gentleman's constituency may ultimately get vouchers, but whether they get nursery education is another matter. People cannot use their vouchers if there is not a provider. A voucher will be a meaningless piece of paper for people in remote areas. It is not a guarantee that a place will be found.

Mr. Walker *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman has intervened, and he will undoubtedly speak in the debate. If he listens carefully to my views and to those expressed by people in rural and remote areas, he will hear some common sense. In *The Times* last April, the Secretary of State for Education said:

"Vouchers are not the favoured option."

In October 1994, the right hon. Lady told *The Independent* newspaper:

"I am very conscious of the unwieldy nature of vouchers".

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden)—a rare wise voice among the gibbering rabble that are today's Tory party—described the nursery voucher system as a

"rather spatchcocked scheme to provide a little more partial nursery education to a few more people aged 5".

In January this year, he complained in the House about the fact that the Government would hand millions of pounds to people who can afford to pay for private

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education. This ludicrous experiment is not about choice—although the Secretary of State insists it is. In Stirling, he said:

"our proposals will enable them"—

parents—

"to spend the voucher money on the nursery education that they choose".

No, it will not—it will provide a voucher, not a place.

I shall deal now with the detailed criticisms of the scheme made by virtually every organisation that submitted evidence to the Government during the consultation process. I wonder why the Secretary of State says that the scheme has been thought through and is subject to consultation when he ignores the outcome of the consultation process. Why is he so arrogant in saying that it will go ahead, irrespective of the views he has canvassed?

The first criticism is that the voucher scheme will be very costly to run. New providers will receive no money to meet start-up costs for buildings, facilities and implementation and training. The voucher will not cover the full cost of a place, and nothing is being done to create new places. The Government are waiting for providers to appear like street peddlers on the day of a football match.

It will be a bureaucratic nightmare. Administration has already taken £3 million out of the pot available for the pilot studies, with an unspecified amount going to the consultants, Capita. That sum alone would have provided some 1,800 nursery places across Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I wonder whether Ministers are in the Chamber to listen, to learn and to respond. I wonder how the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), will be able to wind up the debate if he does not listen to what is being said.

The Secretary of State told us that a voucher of £1,100 will have a £22 administration cost attached to it. However, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council has published the bureaucratic steps—which it is widely acknowledged are accurate—that will be required for the voucher system to work.

The process will involve 10 stages. In stage 1, the Child Benefit Agency sends an application for a voucher to the parents, and advertisements are placed. In stage 2, the parents complete the form and send it to Capita. In stage 3, Capita sends the voucher back. In stage 4, the parents select a nursery school from the list, and, if there is a vacancy, enrol their child. In stage 5, parents give the voucher to the nursery. In stage 6, the nursery gives the voucher to the local authority, which, in stage 7, returns it to Capita. In stage 8, Capita confirms receipt of the voucher to the Department of Education in the Scottish Office, which, in stage 9, sends the money to the local authority. In stage 10, the money is sent to the school.

We are told that that process will cost only £22 per nursery voucher. That is not credible, and no one will believe it for a moment. The process is mind-boggling in its complexity, and enormous in its bureaucracy. We are told that it will cost only £22, but that simply will not wash.

The nursery voucher scheme will endanger existing provision for three-year-olds in Scotland. At present, education for three and four-year-olds is not compulsory. With all the attention on four-year-olds, focus will be diverted from existing provision for three-year-olds. What about special needs education provision for three-year-olds?

Virtually all the organisations that have submitted evidence have said that the system will seriously erode standards in Scottish education. It is no wonder that the Secretary of State chose to confuse us in January—he certainly could not convince us about standards. It seems that teachers may not be employed in the nurseries. In Stirling, the Secretary of State said:

"views are divided on whether it is necessary to provide fully trained teachers".

Of course opinion is divided: everyone is on one side of the argument and the Secretary of State and his Ministers are on the other. That is the division. We all know what the Secretary of State means: he will decide for us. It is either education or it is not. If there is no education, nurseries will become expensive playgrounds, and that is all. The Secretary of State should be honest about that.

But the question of nursery standards goes even deeper. What about the premises that will be provided for nursery schools? What about the non-teachers who will staff them, and their qualifications? What about safety in nursery schools? What about school security, about which Lord Cullen is inquiring presently in Stirling?

The Secretary of State said that proper standards of inspection would be spelled out in the Bill, but they are not. There are provisions regarding powers for the Secretary of State, but he did not identify the standards. He told us today that two additional inspectors will be hired to inspect the new providers. There are 100 inspectors in England, and that is too few. Few of the measures regarding standards and inspection from the English legislation are in the Scottish legislation. Why have the Government chosen to use orders and negative procedures in Parliament instead of including the measures in primary legislation?

We know from the Government's quality assurance document that quality assurance is a vague approach to self-completion of a profile and self-evaluation and inspection. That will be done by ministerial fiat—through unspecified blanket powers given to the Secretary of State by the Bill. Unless minimum standards are spelled out in the Bill and in public—we know what light-touch quality assurance is—we can conclude only one thing: this project is about low standards, low quality and cheapskate provision which is of no educational value.

We know what the Secretary of State is up to. If he is to hand out the money before the election, there must be places and there will be no places without providers. Therefore, standards will be deliberately dropped in order to encourage the providers to come forward quickly. That is the market solution: pile 'em high and sell 'em quick. That is the Government's approach to education, and to everything else.

The voucher system is a serious danger to special needs education at pre-school level. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) correctly pointed out that special needs education is not tackled in the Government's Bill. The Secretary of State said in Stirling:

"the pilot scheme will test the best way to achieve that".

He repeated that vague statement this afternoon.

The Secretary of State also said:

"some argue that vouchers should be more valuable for children with Special Education Needs. Others say that it is not right and that resources must be directed in other ways".

Why did the Government not know the answers to those questions before the piloting began? The Secretary of State said that the system had been thought through. Why was that critical issue not thought through before the plan was wheeled out conveniently before the election? Do the Government not care about those vulnerable kids in pre-school education who have special needs? What about all the rural areas that the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) mentioned, where an £1,100 voucher will simply be a useless piece of paper and a meaningless election bribe of no consequence to finding a pre-school place?

This country needs good nursery education, and Scottish children deserve the best. They deserve more than this botched experiment in ideological alchemy. Labour believes in nursery education, and Labour will deliver.

Our country is now 35th in the world's education and training league, and the Government should be deeply ashamed of that striking and revealing fact. We spend less per pupil on early education than every European Union country except Ireland, and we spend a smaller proportion of our education budget on three and four-year-olds than any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country. That may help to explain the humiliation of our 35th place.

The voucher scheme is doomed to failure. It is shoddy in character and deficient in detail, and will be lamentable in effect. It is simply a forerunner to the ultimate Thatcherite ambition of the creation of a supermarket in education. That creation will be properly stillborn when the electorate have their say within the next 50 weeks.

5.20 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): First, I wish to say "welcome back" to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State after his outstanding visit to the far east. All of us in Scotland, even Opposition Members, will welcome his achievement because it will bring more jobs to Scotland. That is a first class achievement and I am surprised that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) did not mention it in his opening remarks, if only on behalf of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

It is a long time since I was a Minister for education in 1971-74. Then, the battle was entirely different. It was about roofs over heads; there was no school accommodation and we were short of teachers. All those problems have been mostly overcome, although I know that some of the school buildings erected in the 1950s and 1960s are now tired. That is an added problem for education authorities trying to keep their schools up to the standard that we would all like.

I felt thoroughly depressed by the remarks of the hon. Member for Hamilton, who spoke for the Labour party today. He seems to be against everything.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The right hon. Gentleman had that written down before he even heard his speech.

Sir Hector Monro: I did not. The hon. Gentleman is wrong—not for the first time—but I do not wish to quarrel with him.

It was disappointing that we heard such a negative speech from the hon. Member for Hamilton and that he was supported by only six or seven Back Benchers. I should have thought that for such an important debate on education in Scotland—

Mr. George Robertson: Where are the Tories?

Sir Hector Monro: Every Conservative who can speak in the debate is present. On the Labour side, only a small percentage of those eligible to speak are here. The hon. Gentleman should be disappointed that this major debate on education—perhaps the most important debate for Scotland in the House this Session—is so poorly supported by Labour Members. Perhaps they are at odds with him, like the rest of the country. It was also depressing to witness the semantic wriggling of the hon. Member as he attempted to escape the hooks on which he is caught by his policies. He is like an inverted Micawber, looking for something to turn down rather than something to turn up. That is not good news for Scottish education.

The Bill is about choice and standards. Both sides of the House sometimes underestimate the standard of much of our education. Many of the schools in Scotland, especially rural schools, are of a high standard. That is backed up by the inspectors' reports, which I am sure we all read when we receive them from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. Those reports highlight how well many of the schools are doing. If we have been reading such reports for long enough, we can read between the lines and tell when an inspector is not pleased with a school, but the majority of the reports are complimentary. That progress will be backed up, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said today, by the appropriate tests.

As this country approaches the millennium, we must take every opportunity to reach higher standards of training if we are to produce youngsters, both boys and girls, who can work in the future. I agree with the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Hamilton that we must not overlook those who have special needs. I frequently feel a little disappointed at the amount of progress on issues such as dyslexia, because those who suffer from it need specialist support.

The many new plans in the Bill will enable important steps to be taken to raise standards and enhance qualifications, especially through the new Scottish Qualifications Authority. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded the House that Government expenditure on education has gone up by 15 per cent. in real terms since 1979, from £1 billion under Labour to £2.5 billion today. He also reminded us that we spend 25 per cent. more on education in Scotland than in England and Wales.

Today, we are right to support pre-school playgroups, nursery education and more formal education for the under-fives, because that is what many parents in Scotland want. The vouchers will be a new resource to help to provide that education for our youngsters. I say that with a wry smile because in December 1973, as a Minister responsible for education, I produced a White Paper which proposed nursery education for all. Here we are, 20 years later, about to put a first foot on the ladder towards providing that. Of course, any education authority could have provided full nursery education under current

[Sir Hector Monro]

legislation, but they have all been reluctant to do so, usually with the good excuse that they never had any money.

Mr. Gallie: I have listened with interest to my hon. Friend's remarks about what was on the cards in 1973. Surely the downfall for nursery education was the election of a Labour Government in 1974.

Sir Hector Monro: Yes. A number of good policies that I proposed in 1973 and 1974 got scrapped, but the Labour party shows no sign of conscience about what it failed to do for so long.

Whatever Opposition Members say, there is no doubt that parental choice has been a success. In areas where school boards have been introduced, they have been extremely valuable and shown how parents want to assist with the provision of their children's education in a host of ways, in a community sense rather than a strictly educational sense. One or two problems have been caused by parental choice and they are addressed in clause 32. Some good rural schools, which are about five or 10 miles from an urban area, have been inundated with youngsters from that area because the schools have a good reputation. That has caused immense problems with the catchment areas of rural schools. We must be flexible and consider carefully how to deal with that problem in the Bill.

Frequently, I have seen good country schools, with one, two or three teachers and fewer than 100 pupils, whose success has acted like a honeypot and they have drawn in pupils from urban areas. The schools have started to burst at the seams and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his speech, we have reached an illogical position in which local children—who perhaps live within sight of the school, a quarter or half a mile or even 100 yards away—are unable to get into their local rural school because it has too many pupils, many of whom have come from outwith the catchment area. That is not acceptable and I am glad that the Bill will deal with that problem.

The problem will not be easily resolved, and I shall study carefully the distances given in the Bill. I do not know why in a United Kingdom Parliament we have to deal with kilometres in respect of school catchment areas. Why can we not deal with miles? Then the average parent could get in his or her motor car and work out from the mileometer the distance from home to school, which cannot be done in kilometres. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food talks about metres, kilometres and hectares. Why can we not use British measurements, particularly in the Bill? I shall certainly work out how many miles are involved when we get to the Committee stage—not that I am volunteering to serve on the Committee, although it is likely that that will happen.

We must get everything right because there is a lot of friction in the countryside. The legislation must help education authorities that are providing good schools to overcome the issue of parental choice, which I have been dealing with recently in my constituency.

I have been concerned long enough, particularly in respect of primary and secondary schools, about how little the average child knows about the environment and the countryside, as highlighted by the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis and the advice to schools about the food that children should eat. Even a cramped curriculum should provide some opportunity to teach children about the land in which they live, how farms operate, how food is produced and the way in which the food chain works. No doubt in common with many other hon. Members, I should also like more to be done in schools in respect of sport and recreation, but that is for another debate.

I should like to think that more could be built on farm visits, with first and second year secondary pupils visiting a farm once a year to see how it works and learn how the countryside develops, so that when they grow up they will tend to husband the environment that will be so important to them in the future. Perhaps education authorities and the National Farmers Union could work together to bring more practical knowledge to the average pupil. The cost need not be high—perhaps £5,000, £10,000 or £15,000 a year for the average authority. Time is more problematical, whether one is talking about sport, religious education or the many other subjects in which we would like to educate children.

As to school transport and statutory walking distances, particularly in respect of catchment areas, we are at risk of being a little out of date. Years ago, walking five miles to school was no problem but today it is. More worrying, in terms of personal security, is the prospect of children walking home in the dark. Wherever possible, local authorities try to avoid that happening by providing school buses or taxis, even for short distances. We must consider carefully the distance that a child is required to walk to and from school in the 1990s.

We must also re-examine in the near future the subject of school security, which is currently a sensitive issue—I had a problem in my own constituency at the weekend. The Government and all education authorities are considering school security. It is difficult to balance the community feeling that we want in schools with a prison-like security system—bearing in mind the fact that nearly every school has umpteen points of access and it is difficult to monitor every one. However, we can consider using closed-circuit television and janitors in prominent locations.

The Committee stage will provide the opportunity to debate much of value to school children, which is the Government's whole objective in presenting the Bill. It is particularly disappointing that the Labour party is being so negative. I hope that we shall hear something more constructive from the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists. So far, one is profoundly disappointed at the attitude of the official Opposition towards the education of our children, which must be a top priority in Scotland.

5.34 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Scotland gave one of the longest speeches that he has ever made in introducing a Bill—and still we wait for him to address the special educational needs of children. The Conservatives have been in power for umpteen years, they have been in charge of the education of many young people all their school lives, yet teenagers are still leaving school without the achievements of which they are capable.

The Secretary of State, answering an intervention, said that he would think about special needs provision. Last summer, parents and organisations started telling me and

other hon. Members of their concerns about children with special educational needs, so it is high time that the right hon. Gentleman gave that matter serious thought. We should have proposals before us today. It is not adequate to say that testing will be undertaken in the pilot, because nothing has been done to provide for special needs in the pilot.

The problem of funding has been widely raised. Children with special educational needs will obviously cost more per place. Another crucial aspect that the Secretary of State has failed to address is how a child with special educational needs will be identified by the rank amateurs who will be running wee nurseries simply because parents can produce vouchers.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The hon. Lady has not quite grasped the point that my right hon. Friend was making. He said that when the authorities were invited to propose special adjustments to the pilot they said that they could cope with special educational needs within the pilot scheme. That assertion came from the authorities, not the Government.

Mrs. Fyfe: We have become used to that kind of complacency from the Government. We are meant to be representing the concerns of parents. Often it is only when a child reaches primary school that his or her special needs are identified. We want a system to ensure that such needs are recognised as early as possible, and to ensure that resources are in place to meet those needs. That could mean dealing with a mental impairment, or something as simple as providing spectacles. All sorts of problems can be identified in a child at three years of age.

The Bill states that nursery providers will have to meet the Secretary of State's requirements, but we have yet to be told the minimum requirements. We await details of the curriculum, which should have been before us for this debate. It is not difficult to get people working on an adequate minimum curriculum for children of the age range in question. Nothing has been said about staff qualifications, the ratio of qualified to unqualified staff or the ratio of staff to the number of children attending. That, too, remains up in the air. The Bill does not even make specific mention of basic requirements such as a nursery's ability to provide first aid for the sort of accidents that can befall young children. It does not mention equal opportunities for access to nurseries, nor does it refer to complaints procedures. We have been told, to our astonishment, that there will be two extra inspectors, but nothing was said about how frequently they will inspect or what will happen as a result of their inspections.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Fyfe: Let me make some progress.

A crucial point arises about facilities. In the Scottish Grand Committee, I asked a question about outdoor play facilities, because the Minister had said that church halls would be available throughout Scotland and that they were appropriate for nursery provision. If there is no outdoor play space, they are grossly inadequate. We do not want to see young children cooped up indoors, regardless of the weather, unable to play outside and benefit from the educational play and sporting opportunities that could be made available to them. It is not good enough to say that church halls are available all over the place. We must ensure that the facilities are appropriate for the children. They should have furniture and toilet facilities sized to their needs instead of having to make do with inadequate facilities.

Why are the Government so negative about the needs of our youngest children? I have never understood that. We have had umpteen debates in the House about education—largely about higher education and children of school age. Yet when we finally have a debate about the needs of the pre-fives, the Government want to fob off our youngest children with an inadequate system and inadequate provision.

The Secretary of State has said that nursery education is extremely valuable. Of course it is. It can give a child a flying start at primary school. Crucially, it provides for that child's social education. At nursery school, children can learn not to be selfish, to share, to sort out quarrels peaceably and to come together for activities. Perhaps all this sounds too socialist for Conservative Members. Perhaps that is why they are against social education. A wealth of experience can be opened up to children through the books, toys, games and activities that can be made available in a properly run and managed nursery school run by people who know what they are doing. The same applies to well-run play groups, but the Bill does not guarantee that those standards will be applied, and it does not say what will happen when they are not. That should all be at the top of the education agenda and not dealt with at the minimum possible cost.

It has already been pointed out that the voucher scheme is full of problems. Those problems were identified by private sector providers, as well as by parents, teachers and others. I want the Minister to answer this point. It is unclear how the voucher system will affect the child care disregard for low-wage earners. If the Minister would listen to me, he might be able to answer the point, so I shall wait until he is listening.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am listening.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank the Minister.

At present, low-wage earners cannot subtract a proportion of child care costs—currently £60—from net income when making or renewing family credit claims. That is crucial for low-wage earners, particularly lone parents, to enable them to take up employment opportunities. It is high time that such detail was spelt out, but in his 50-minute speech the Secretary of State did not mention that crucial aspect.

All the problems have been raised by people who know what they are doing, who already have experience of running pre-five provision. The private sector providers told me last summer that they were worried about fraud in a system that is open to abuse. They pointed out that there could easily be a market in vouchers, and that impoverished parents might well attempt to pass on their vouchers to other people. Cheap, minimal providers could drive out of business the responsible, sensible, good providers who set higher standards and pay higher wages for more capable staff. The private sector providers said that they were worried that cheap-jacks might drive them out where there might be more providers than children coming forward. The Secretary of State failed to address that problem. We talk about there being a market, but sometimes the market results in a worse standard. There is no protection in the Bill to guard against that possibility.

[Mrs. Fyfe]

I cannot understand why the Secretary of State did not listen to parents, whose clearly stated view was that they preferred local authority nurseries as their first choice. Yes, they had good words to say about play groups and about a large number of private sector providers, but in the Scottish Parent Teacher Association questionnaire, to which a large number of parents replied, they said that if the breadth of choice of different providers were available to them, their first choice would be the local authority providers. Yet the Secretary of State ignored the fact that empty classrooms are available, especially with the closure of schools that might have remained open if resources were made available to allow a nursery school to use such premises. This is not a new idea. There are excellent examples of nursery provision within a primary school building. Why do the Government not think of that as one way to expand education rather than just handing it to somebody and hoping that somehow a nursery school or class will be set up?

On testing, the Secretary of State is again trying to mislead parents. Every time a teacher sets homework or class work, the teacher can see whether the lesson has been grasped or what points of difficulty the pupil has. The teacher responds to that and the child can start to make progress. Sometimes teachers have to try two or three different ways before the child grasps the point and can move on. The Minister has experience of teaching. He knows that what I am saying is true. That is what teaching is supposed to be about.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Fyfe: The Minister shakes his head, but if the child does not make progress, we have a system to check on the activities of the teachers and the classes. That is why local authorities check on how schools carry out the education of children. If children do not make the progress that they should, that must be addressed. No one on the Opposition Benches is arguing that children should be ill educated or that they should be allowed to leave school without the qualifications that they are capable of achieving. Why do the Government not listen to parents, who said that they were against testing at secondary one and two? It is the parents who realised that it would be a return to the "quali".

Hon. Members who had the benefit of higher or further education will remember that there was always at least one person in the class—I remember it well when I was at Strathclyde—who went on to take high-quality degrees, getting upper seconds and firsts, having been told at 11 or 12 that they had better go and find a job at Woolworth's because they were not going to make it. We all know of people who came through nevertheless and did exceedingly well, but how many must have been discouraged for life? How many must have been made to feel, when the old "quali" existed, that they just could not hack it? How many were told, "You're one of nature's thickies—you can't do it." The child's hopes and ambitions would have been destroyed at a young age. That is why parents are against it. That is why we should listen to them.

I hope that when the Bill is considered in Committee the Government will finally listen to those of us who speak on behalf of Scottish parents.

5.47 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I welcome the opportunity to speak. I shall be brief, not because I do not have much to say but because, as I am sure the House will understand, I have other duties. I am chairing a Committee upstairs.

I should like to address the question of testing, which was mentioned by the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). They spoke about testing for qualifications, and treat that as something different from testing to see whether individuals need help and assistance. I speak as someone who understands what the education exam, the "quali", as it was called, really meant to people of my age group. I am unique in that I am probably the only hon. Member to have left school at 14. I did so because economic circumstances and other things at that time made it inevitable. I do not take the view that the system that then existed failed me. I take the view that circumstances, which my children and most hon. Members never had to suffer, required me to contribute to the family coffers. The House will understand that, in large industrial industries, pre-war, that was a fact of life, particularly if one's father was unemployed. We had to face the fact that circumstances often dictated what we did or did not do. The system that existed then had little to do with the fact that I left school at an age when I probably would have benefited from remaining.

Testing for qualifications is an essential part of knowing whether individuals are capable and ready to move on to other challenges. That is what it represents. Testing to find out whether someone is inadequate in some areas is absolutely vital in the first and second years of secondary education. I have never understood the view that that is not critical—they are the critical years in a child's development. It is equally true that the years before the age of five are important in the development of a child as an individual. That is why I believe that the nursery voucher system and the pilot schemes are vital.

I am astonished by the comments of Labour Members, especially the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), about rural areas. The best schools in Scotland are in rural areas because the best teachers are in rural areas. People like living in rural communities because the quality of life is superior. That is why we are able to attract high-quality teachers to our small rural schools. I also believe that the things that attract teachers to rural areas will attract the private sector—which the Opposition seem to find so offensive—to provide pre-school education. The village and church halls in the rural areas are a hub of activity, so I do not envisage the problems that others do.

I accept that there may be problems in the big cities, but it is astonishing that the Opposition are basing their argument on some belief that the vouchers will be worthless to someone living in Glen Lyon or Glen Farg or some of the other lovely glens around Tayside. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) represents Glen Farg. I picked it deliberately because I know it well. When someone picks something outside his constituency, it is always wise to pick something that was previously in his constituency before the boundary changes.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Hamilton said, I believe that the rural communities will respond to this new opportunity and will grasp it because of the quality

of people living in our rural areas and the quality of the teachers. Of course, not all teachers are able to work full time once they have had children, but they can certainly become involved—

Mr. Connarty: I am worried that the hon. Gentleman is painting a picture so unlike the reality of Scottish education. Does he not realise that the best schools, judged by the standards set by the Government, tend to be in cities or large towns, not rural areas? It is wrong to create a dichotomy between the schools. I believe that the best school in Scotland is in Dunblane—which, with 10,000 people, is not a rural community.

Mr. Walker: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would do his homework more thoroughly and carefully. Tayside is the area that I know in particular, and North Tayside in detail. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that we do not have the best schools, he obviously does not know what is happening in Tayside. I am proud of my rural schools. I am proud of the standards that they achieve. I am proud of what appears on the statistical records—

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross) *rose*—

Mr. Walker: The hon. Lady has some fine schools in her constituency. My children went to them.

Ms Cunningham: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged that under SNP administration Tayside has the best schools in Scotland.

Mr. Walker: I have already given the reason why rural schools are so good—it is because of the quality of the teachers. Often, that was despite the activities and effects—

Ms Cunningham: I see.

Mr. Walker: When the hon. Lady has been here a little longer, she will realise that I have fought my constituency's corner in every battle in this place. I have often had to draw attention to the inadequacies of Tayside region and I am still doing so—for example, the former social work department. However, that matter is being addressed by an inquiry.

Mr. Connarty *rose*—

Mr. Walker: I cannot give way as I must watch the time.

The Bill will make a valuable contribution towards choice, quality and diversity, about all of which I care deeply. One of the things that motivated me to become a Member of Parliament—as it probably motivated others—was my experience of life. I was motivated by the circumstances in which I grew up in Dundee. It made me determined that my children and grandchildren would have better quality, greater diversity and greater choice. I looked at the contributions made by statutory bodies and others and I arrived at my political convictions not out of some mischance of birth, but out of my experience. I do not apologise for that.

I believe that getting the balance right between the public and the private sectors is the best way to provide choice. The voucher system will achieve that in a way that nothing else could do. The administrators will not be able to dictate their dogma. One of the problems with Scottish education has been local government dogma. That is rather sad because once, a long time ago, Scotland had the best education in Europe and therefore in the western world. That is not true today. It is why I welcome the Bill, which will make a massive contribution out of all proportion to the money spent.

Over the long time that I have been in this House I have listened to the Opposition's arguments against the changes in education and other areas that the Government have introduced, so it is interesting to note that it is the Opposition who have changed—the Government have not.

5.57 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) made some interesting points about education in rural areas, to which I shall return later in relation to nursery provision. I do not think that there is any dispute across the House about the importance and value of pre-school education. What is at issue is whether the Government's chosen means to deliver that is the most effective.

The debate is taking place in this Chamber rather than in the Scottish Grand Committee. Despite the much-vaunted claims by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister that the revamped Scottish Grand Committee is as good as a Scottish Parliament, it has fallen at the second hurdle—or the third hurdle if we include the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill as well as the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

I read the exchanges in the Scottish Grand Committee on 20 May. The Secretary of State said that the Opposition had not requested that this debate be held in the Committee. That was one of the most disingenuous excuses that I have heard in a long time, especially as the Secretary of State is not usually a shrinking violet in need of persuasion. Apart from anything else, what he said was not true. On a number of occasions we have challenged the Government to take the motion to discuss the principles of this Bill in the Scottish Grand Committee, but that has not happened because the Government know that part II of the Bill does not command the support of the majority of Scottish Members of Parliament. If the Bill were debated in the Scottish Grand Committee, the Committee would be shown up for what it is—a talking shop with no effective powers of decision making. That is why the Bill is being taken on the Floor of the House.

There are some parts of the Bill on which there is common ground. The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) made a cogent case, to supplement that of the Secretary of State, with regard to placing requests and the need to ensure that local children can attend local schools. Likewise, my right hon. and hon. Friends do not object—indeed they support—the merger between the Scottish Vocational Education Council and the Scottish Examination Board. That has had widespread approval, although the Committee will wish to examine in detail the way in which the body will be composed.

Perhaps one of the tasks that the new Scottish Qualifications Authority can undertake is to simplify for the benefit of employers the relative merit of many of the qualifications that seem to abound these days. I would not be surprised if many employers were confused by a

[Mr. James Wallace]

plethora of modules and acronyms. Any simplification so that employers know the quality and standard of the passes that they are examining would be welcome. One employer to whom I have talked recently mentioned that the fees that were charged at every turn—tuition, examination and marking fees—were putting off employers from going down that road, and that some were using city and guilds. Clause 6(2) provides the power to charge, in accordance with criteria laid down by the Secretary of State. I hope that the criteria will reflect the burden on businesses, which have to meet costs in respect of their trainees.

On the question of finance too, will the Minister comment in his reply on a complaint made to me that, in some examinations—specifically, the Scottish Examination Board's examinations in English were referred to—pre-testing of questions, which is, I think, sometimes done south of border, and which ensures that exams achieve what they intend to achieve and that rogue questions can be discovered and expunged, has been withdrawn? That may be a small matter, but if the process will make exams and results reliable, we want an assurance that corners are not to be cut for the sake of meeting financial targets.

In his speech, the Secretary of State for Scotland launched on the House a reference to testing in secondary one and secondary two. He was somewhat thrown by a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), who asked whether children whose parents did not wish their children to be tested would still be required to be tested. The Secretary of State, true to his belief in parental choice, had to accept that the tests would not be compulsory if parents did not wish their children to sit them. He went on to say that it would not be in children's interests to do so, taking the view that he knows better than parents what is in children's interests.

The Secretary of State went on to make an even more curious point. He drew a parallel and said that there was a similarity between the tests in S1 and S2, which he is proposing, and standard grade and higher grade examinations. That was a worrying statement for the Secretary of State to have made. In one respect, it is not consistent with his comment in another part of his presentation that one of the purposes of the tests was to identify educational needs at an early stage. There is a world of difference between tests designed to identify educational needs and examinations designed to give pupils qualifications either to go out into the world of employment or to further and higher education. The Secretary of State, however, categorised the new tests with the standard and higher grade exams.

The House is entitled to be told by the Minister whether what is proposed is not simply tests to measure a level of achievement or to identify particular needs, but qualification tests as well. Would one have to pass the test in S1 to sit the test in S2? Would one have to sit the test in S2 to be allowed to go on to the course that will lead eventually to standard grade?

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's customary courtesy, but he does not have to wait until the winding-up speech. In the comparison that he used, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland was making the point that the new Scottish Qualifications Authority would be required—as I think the whole House agrees it should—to set standard grade exams and the new "higher still" exams. As an additional function, it will set national exams in reading, writing and mathematics in S1 and S2. There is no prerequisite to sit an exam in S1 to go into S2 and/or to sit one in S2 to go on to standard grade. My right hon. Friend's point was that the SQA will be supplying exams at standard grade and higher grade. It is up to parents, teachers and pupils whether pupils sit those exams. It will be the same for new national exams set by the SQA at S1 and S2.

Mr. Wallace: That helps to clarify the matter up to a point. It suggests that, when he made that direct comparison, the Secretary of State was getting into waters that he had not thought about. The House will note the Minister's comment that it would be up to parents, teachers and pupils as to whether pupils sat the exams in S1 and S2. That is a further development on what was said by the Secretary of State.

As has been said, the most controversial part of the Bill relates to nursery vouchers. I got the impression that the more volume the Secretary of State turned up in his defence of vouchers, the more he was not quite convinced by his argument. I do not doubt for one minute his commitment to the concept of choice. As a party, we also adhere to that concept. The problem for the Secretary of State is that he recognises that his chosen means of providing education for pre-fives will not necessarily deliver the sort of choice that he was praising so highly.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) said that a Scottish Pre-School Play Association questionnaire showed that the number one choice for the majority of parents was local authority nursery education. That in no way devalues or detracts from other pre-school provision, but that was the parents' choice.

It is also clear that, in many parts of Scotland, local authority-provided nursery education is not available. Underlying all this is that one may receive a voucher and use the system and child benefits to work out who is entitled to vouchers, but the voucher itself is no guarantee of a place. For some people in other parts of Scotland, it will be a Hobson's choice. There may be only the one option. Choice will not be there.

I agree with the comment that, when the vouchers are introduced in regions where pilot schemes are working, 100,000 flowers will bloom and new projects will spring up all over the place. I suspect that, in many places, existing playgroups are anxious not to lose out and are filing applications. That is not necessarily to detract from or in any way to decry what they are doing, but we may not be seeing a great expansion in the number of places.

We may also be reducing the number of places available for three-year-olds. In many parts of Scotland, where some local authorities have made the effort, provision is made for three-year-olds. There must be concern that, in the effort to expand, through the scheme, nursery provision for four-year-olds, three-year-olds who would have a place may be denied one.

Liberal Democrat Members are also concerned that the voucher's value will not cover the costs of a nursery place. I understand that, in evidence given by Fife regional council to the Select Committee of the other House, the figure of £3,000 for a full-time place in a

free-standing nursery was mentioned. Clearly, a £1,100 voucher would not meet that. I have been told that, in the Orkney part of my constituency, the average cost of a place in some nurseries could be covered by £1,100, although whether it could cover five-day sessions is not entirely clear.

The important point was made, however, that that will apply only if there were a roll of 18 or more. The pilot study will have to consider whether the numbers will be there to make the voucher's value cover the cost of providing a nursery place in some of Scotland's more thinly populated regions, where it is always difficult to find rolls of 18 children aged four years, or even aged three and four years. In relation to the pilot scheme, the Government may have to consider the possibility of different value vouchers in different regions.

Equally, the local authority or others may expect to provide places for nursery pupils in remote regions, but the chances are that those are the same regions where pupils have to travel some distance and where additional costs of providing transport are involved.

There is a serious question mark over whether the placement costs will be covered but capital costs will not be covered by the vouchers. They are the costs, in the setting up of new provision, of meeting health and safety requirements and being able to train staff to the standard that we believe is necessary to look after the under-fives. It is not so long since my children were under five and I can well remember what they were like. Looking after children of that age requires considerable skill and ability.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred to a passage in the record of the Scottish Grand Committee in Stirling and quoted what the Secretary of State said in response, I think, to an intervention that I had made. Many of us were appalled and shocked to hear the Secretary of State suggest that full and proper training might be an ideal to which we could aspire but which, in the real world, we might not be able to reach. The cost of providing adequately trained staff is an important part of the equation and one which vouchers will not cover.

The matter of quality assurance has been mentioned. We have been told that the number of inspectors will be increased by two. I have seen figures suggesting that a nursery class can expect to be inspected on average once every 17 years. I do not know whether the Minister can confirm that; if he cannot, I should like to know how often nursery classes are inspected and how much more frequently they are likely to be inspected as a result of the two additional inspectors.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Every provider in the pilot areas will be inspected in the pilot year. We would then expect that nationally every new operator would be inspected in the first 24 months of the system.

Mr. Wallace: That is quite an undertaking, given what the situation appears to be at the moment. Of course, it is not only what happens at first or in the pilot scheme in the first year that we have to consider; inspection needs to be on-going, and I suspect that assurances of quality will not suffice in the longer term. By comparison, I understand that social work departments inspect playgroups annually. If playgroups expect to be upgraded, it is important that the inspections continue.

In an intervention on the Secretary of State, I referred to special needs education. I shall not elaborate because the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) dealt with the subject very well.

While we have been debating this afternoon, the Scottish Pre-School Play Association has been holding a reception in another part of the building. Although the Minister with responsibility for education has said that the SPPA will receive some assistance to reach voucher-eligible status, it is very concerned that funding for its other work—work that is not related to the pre-school voucher initiative—is under threat, especially as the Scottish Office has said that the SPPA will not be receiving funding from the Scottish Office's education and industry section for some of its on-going costs.

We all recognise the valuable work of the SPPA. It is the umbrella group for playgroups across Scotland, which provide services for some 82,000 children. The SPPA says that it is important to distinguish between the organisation's need for an increase in funding to meet its recurring commitments and the arrival of the pre-school voucher initiative. I hope that it is not too late for the Minister to have second thoughts.

If the SPPA does not receive its essential core funding, any work that it might be able to do with the pre-school voucher initiative might fall by the wayside because, as it says, its funding crisis would prevent it from providing services and threaten the very viability of the organisation. It would be regrettable if the funding for the voucher system was found at the expense of a very valuable organisation.

All hon. Members recognise pre-school education as a valuable provision. It can help to identify children's particular needs at an early stage and it helps young people acquire social and communication skills. It would miss the point if pre-school provision had a purely educational remit as much learning can be done through play. Until now, Scotland has enjoyed a variety of provision not only through nursery classes but through playgroups. Also, some parents require not nursery classes or playgroups but care for their children. That is not covered by the voucher system. For the reasons that I have outlined, we do not believe that the voucher system will deal with the needs of all children or provide the adequate and proper pre-school provision that people want. Scotland's young people deserve better than what is being proposed.

6.14 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I must begin by expressing my disappointment that no other Ayrshire Member of Parliament has been here for this important debate. I know that some Ayrshire Members are in the building and might have other duties to perform, but nothing is more important for the future of Scotland than the education of our young people. I deplore the fact that the Bill does not seem to inspire the interest that I believe it deserves.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) mentioned the Scottish Grand Committee. I understand what he says. This is an important Bill, but the reality is that we do not have a majority on the Scottish Grand Committee, so we cannot introduce controversial legislation in that forum. Nevertheless, any party in government that could command a majority in it could pass all legislation affecting Scotland in the Scottish Grand

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Committee. It is worth remembering, however, that a Scottish Grand Committee can hear from Ministers with United Kingdom posts that have a bearing on Scottish issues, whereas a Scottish Assembly, were we to have one, could not. While I accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism in respect of this Bill, the realities are as I have stated.

Mr. McAvoy: Can we take it from the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the practicalities of the present composition of the Scottish Grand Committee that he accepts that he, his party and the Government are unrepresentative of the people of Scotland?

Mr. Gallie: No. I accept that, at the previous general election, we did not get as many Scottish Tories elected as I should have liked. I think that we shall rectify that next time, but that remains to be seen. More Scottish Tories will be elected at the next election and they will be sitting on the Government Benches, attending key debates such as this.

I do not accept that the Scottish Grand Committee is a talking shop. We have achieved much. The Scottish people have gained much from the fact that the Committee has moved around Scotland, engendering interest wherever it goes.

If we were to follow the line taken by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, we should not have been able to pass important legislation such as the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995. That Act tightens law and order provisions, but the Opposition would not have supported it. The same is true of the legislation introducing single-tier authorities in Scotland—having heard the debates on it, I am sure that we would not have been able to pass it in a Scottish Grand Committee. However, many people recognise the wisdom of what the Government have done in Scotland. Perhaps some Opposition Members might support us in changed circumstances—I leave that as a matter for further thought.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also said that three-year-olds could lose out if the nursery voucher system were introduced. I do not think that that will be the case. We should consider the matter more positively, although the hon. Gentleman's remarks were more positive than those that I have heard from the Labour party.

We must recognise that when we talk about provision for three-year-olds we are not necessarily thinking of education but of social services. I shall address the points on playgroups and playschools later in my speech.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland made one interesting point about the cost of service provision. He said that nursery schools in Orkney and Shetland can provide approximately £1,000 to £1,500 for full-time sessions. I am quite surprised about that, and I compliment them if they can provide that service. We must come back to the basics. We are not offering a full-time nursery education service for all pre-school children. Our hope is that we can work towards that. This provision is a major step forward, and all hon. Members should realise that great benefits will come from it.

I should like to list a number of reasons why I welcome the Bill. It addresses several key issues about the education of our children for the future and recognises a need for some change. "Change" is a word that we live with day to day. It is not a popular word with everyone. At times, change can create a great deal of uncertainty. I suggest that the word "change" puts a damper on what I believe is the current feel-good factor in the United Kingdom, and in Scotland. Change has that effect, because people worry about it as it is a move away from what they recognise and understand. It causes anxiety.

Regardless of the anxiety that is caused by change, a responsible Government must recognise the need for it. Change is essential, whether in the world of work, in the world of leisure or in the world of education.

Mr. Connarty: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that change should be welcomed when there is some doubt about the current system, whether it is a system of work or of education? Is he really saying that the pre-school nursery provision that is available—when the money is available—needs to be changed to provision that is cheaper, and therefore less substantial and less successful?

Mr. Gallie: I am saying that nursery education has been talked about right back to 1973, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) introduced his plans for the provision of nursery education. He did not get that opportunity, because a Labour Government were elected and did not subscribe to the line of providing nursery education. That was regrettable.

No doubt there were other priorities in the 1980s, but the Conservative party has always aimed towards providing nursery education. The Conservative party is making additional resources available to take a first major step towards creating a national nursery education system, which I should have thought every hon. Member would welcome. I am absolutely astonished that people want to turn their backs on additional Government money being made available for such a service. When the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) talked about change, he dealt with one part of the Bill. There is another very important part of it, which I shall deal with shortly.

Major changes to our educational structures have occurred in the past 17 years, and there have been major improvements in a variety of ways. The Government have introduced standard grades to the great benefit of youngsters in my constituency and across the country.

The introduction of vocational qualifications was a major step forward. That was something new, and it was a part of the Government's vision. I do not believe that any hon. Member would now seek to repeal the legislation that introduced those changes in vocational education. The changes were good for Scotland and for young people. They set a goal for young people—people who were perhaps not good in theoretical matters but who were good in practical matters. Vocational qualifications are good for those people, and Conservative Members should take great pride in that fact.

Let us consider primary school testing. There was occasionally great dispute about testing, but that change was necessary. I have recently been watching events far across the waters—in Taiwan and in China. Testing is a part of everyday education in those countries. There is testing at every stage. If we consider the example of Taiwan, we find very high levels of success and extremely high standards are achieved. Achievement levels among their primary school children frequently exceed those of our children.

We should learn from their achievements, and we should not mock. I detected some mocking among Opposition Members when I was speaking about the Chinese and the Taiwanese. We should not mock those people. They have their own cultures and their own ways. We can learn from them, just as they can learn from us.

Mr. Connarty: Does the hon. Gentleman know anything about the five-to-14 programme? Can he tell me where assessment fits in the modes of learning in five-to-14? Can he tell me where assessment is currently deficient and where it does not exist from 5-to-14, from primary 1 to S2 in Scotland?

Mr. Gallie: The five-to-14 programme was introduced by this Government. They recognised the benefits of such a programme and introduced it. If I think back to my time at school, I cannot remember a time when there was not some formal testing. I cannot remember a time in secondary school, at first and second year levels, when there were not tests. The problem was perhaps that the tests tended to be fragmented and that there was no base level that everyone had to achieve. Testing will perhaps remove that problem in the future. I shall speak about testing later in my speech.

Parental choice is another very important aspect of the Government's treatment of education. Many of my constituents take advantage of the ability to move their children outside their catchment area. They do so for a range of reasons, and not only to send their children to the high-standard school to which everyone wants to send their children. They do so for family reasons. For example, it may be handy for parents to take their children to a particular school. Parents have that level of choice, which improves the quality of life for them and for their children.

Opposition Members dramatically opposed those provisions when they were introduced some years ago. Perhaps there has now been some change. Perhaps the Labour spokeswoman, the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), will tell us that a Labour Government would never go back on those provisions for parental choice. I do not believe that they would go back on them. If such a Government intended to do so, I do not think that they would have the benefit of the backing of Liberal Members, on whom such a Government would almost certainly depend were they ever elected.

Parental involvement in school boards is another aspect of the Government's education policy. I accept what the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) said about schools, such as Arbroath high school, not having a school board. That is the parents' choice, and it is very sad, but perhaps they felt that school boards do not have enough power. Putting that right might be an opportunity that the Bill misses; perhaps we should consider it in the future.

Parliament sets the agenda in all these matters, but, ultimately, local authorities deliver. Perhaps that is a weakness in the education system in Scotland. Perhaps our devolving so much responsibility to local authorities is a flaw in the system. We have introduced major changes in secondary schools. We have affected the number of children who stay on at school—42.6 per cent. of pupils go on to the fifth year, and then on to the sixth year. That is quite a step up from the situation in 1979—it is almost double the number. It is a magnificent achievement.

The number of school leavers who go into higher education now stands at 43 per cent. That is phenomenal. What is wrong with Scottish education? Why are we hearing all these gripes? I do not understand the complaints, because we are succeeding and we are achieving.

I am very impressed with the standard and quality of many of the young people who come out of our schools these days and go into university. They are absolutely tremendous; I am proud of them. I do not know what other hon. Members think, but I believe that there are many high fliers and high achievers coming through our schools. In many ways, our education system encourages them and gives them opportunities.

There are now 413,000 Scottish students in higher and further education. We have doubled the number since 1979. That is a remarkable achievement, despite the despondent and denigrating comments of Opposition Members. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State commented earlier on Labour's record in the 1970s and, thinking of that, I have to ask Opposition Members how on earth they can criticise us. They should look back at their own record. I shall read *Hansard* tomorrow, look at the figures and get my press releases ready for the weekend, because I think that they are blinking good figures.

Part I of the Bill is about the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which seems to have been a gleam in the eye since the mid-1980s. Now is the right time to introduce the change. People in the world of education recognise the need, have been consulted and have given their support. To his credit, even the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) supports the idea. I can tell the hon. Member for Falkirk, East that that is one element of change that he will support, because I do not reckon that he would want to cut across the aims of the hon. Member for Hamilton. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East criticised me when I was talking about some elements of change, but here is one element of change in the Bill to which he will give whole-hearted backing. That is nice, and I welcome it.

The Bill represents a forging together of secondary school qualifications and vocational qualifications. That is important. It must help with co-ordination and improve quality, and it recognises the needs both of academia and of commercial interests. Those steps will do much not only for educational provision, but will improve the standards of the youngsters who go into business, and on whom Britain's future will be built.

The Bill will set standards and create a quality assurance trail. It will blend in with, and build upon, what was there before. We should not denigrate what was in place before. We should recognise the achievements, and pay tribute to those who have served on the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council. All of them have contributed something.

I had just got used to SCOTVEC, NVQs and SVQs, but now I suppose I must start getting used to talking about the SQA instead. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Minister is telling me that those qualifications will still exist, and I take my hon. Friend's guidance on that.

The hon. Member for Hamilton talked about the composition of the new body, but I cannot imagine a composition very different from that recommended by my

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right hon. Friend. Naturally, the Secretary of State would want to control to some degree such an important body, and I have no objection to that.

However, the SQA will be obliged to establish an accreditation committee, which will be quorate only if it has a majority of non-SQA members. Perhaps either in his winding-up speech or by picking up the point now, my hon. Friend the Minister will say a little about the accreditation committee, because although I have read the Bill carefully I do not quite understand what it is for, or why it should be balanced in such a way.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Perhaps I may help my hon. Friend now. That point was raised in another place, too. We are determined that the accreditation committee, although part of the SQA, will be separate from the authority's other functions. The committee's purpose will be to accredit other bodies that award qualifications, such as the City and Guilds, to ensure that their qualifications are up to the necessary standard and meet all the criteria.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend. Does that suggest that, through accreditation, some of our major institutions will still have an input into the awards? I hope that my hon. Friend will think about that and come back to the issue—if not now, in Committee, because I should like to follow it up.

The amendment tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, with a rag, tag and bobtail bunch following behind, is totally negative. It says nothing good or positive about the Bill; it is simply a damnation of the nursery education aspect of it. In my view, the amendment is pretty pathetic—and it was reflected in the quality of the speech made by the hon. Member for Hamilton.

I referred earlier to the establishing of single-tier authorities in Scotland. Now, I should like to pay a little tribute to the new Labour-run South Ayrshire authority, which has recognised that, over the years, Strathclyde regional council had no intention of fulfilling the desires and hopes of the people in my constituency for the provision of nursery education.

South Ayrshire now has the powers and can deal with the matter locally, and it is attempting to provide a basic nursery education system. For 20 years, Strathclyde regional council failed to do that, yet in its first year the new single-tier authority is already addressing an issue that the locals really want to be tackled.

However, the authority was somewhat misguided in that it failed to push for inclusion in the voucher scheme project, which has cost my constituents a lot of money. Although added cash could have come into South Ayrshire, council tax payers will have to pay for the change instead, and I greatly regret that. Although I praise the council's action in providing nursery education, I criticise it for failing to get its act together on the nursery education voucher scheme.

Perhaps I put that slightly unfairly, because the leader of the authority challenged me the other day by saying, "We didn't fail to get our act together; we simply decided not to go for the scheme." I suggest that that was even worse; once again, it meant added costs for my council tax payers, and it removed opportunities from many children in my constituency because the pre-school scheme will be limited.

Many children in my constituency attend private nursery schools. Perhaps they could have been given the opportunity to spend more time there, or perhaps parents could have sent a second child along too. Who knows? In any case, the opportunity was lost.

The scheme is also seriously flawed in terms of its effect on playgroups. South Ayrshire is pushing out one or two playgroups that meet in schools, and very little help is being offered to them at present. Not only has the authority cost parents dear by not going for the scheme, but it is also depriving to some degree those whose parents chose the playgroup option. I regret that.

However, the council intends to look into what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) described as the "church hall" scenario. I understand that it is prepared to put cash in for the capital equipment that the church hall groups need to meet the basic standards required for the provision of playgroup or nursery education.

I have heard much today about a failure to control and inspect nursery schools, but in fact such schools are already examined by local authorities. In the private sector, they cannot go ahead without such inspection, so standards and levels of inspection have already been set.

I regret that we have failed to cash in on the opportunity for nursery provision, but I am delighted that, due to the Bill, the problem will not last for too long. The Bill will fulfil the aims and aspirations of many of the young mothers who made representations to me before the 1992 election. They stated clearly that they wanted nursery school provision. The Bill gives a commitment to fund every pre-school child to the tune of £1,100—quite a commitment.

More important, the way in which the provision will be introduced will give parents an element of choice. Not every parent wants their child to receive nursery education; some want the option of a playgroup. Why should they not be able to benefit from such choice? The Bill will allow that choice. The Bill will also allow local authorities to gain additional funding. If they provide services and people want to use them, they will attract more funding in the longer term. On that basis, I will welcome the Bill becoming law.

The amendment tabled by the Opposition says that the nursery voucher scheme is "educationally unsound". It is not; it is an educational advancement. Where there was no provision before, there will be in future. I find the suggestion that the scheme is educationally unsound insulting, given some of the excellent private nursery school facilities in Scotland. There are some excellent schools, which have been well used by parents, where teachers are of a high standard and provide a quality service. Labour is wrong to suggest that the scheme is educationally unsound.

The amendment also describes the scheme as "administratively wasteful". I do not believe that it is. Many of the facilities have already been provided. Provision in our schools and local authorities can be used. Playgroups already have resources. Any scheme that builds on that can hardly be considered wasteful. I do not accept that the scheme is wasteful; Labour is wrong again.

We are told in the amendment that the scheme is "socially divisive". I suggest that there is equal opportunity for all. The provision of £1,100 for every pre-school child must mean equal opportunity. At present,

there is not equal opportunity because in many areas such facilities have not been provided by the local authorities that have had responsibility.

Labour Members have a cheek to talk about social division in such issues. They seem to believe that what is good for their leaders should not be available to the great mass of the population. We have only to look at the children of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). Indeed, we should look further back, to the education of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), and even the arch-socialist, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who I know is on parliamentary business elsewhere. I shall not criticise him as I did other Opposition Members who represent Ayrshire, but even he, an ardent socialist, took advantage of the private education facilities of which he would deprive others. Labour is wrong, too, about the Bill causing social divisions—there will be none.

Part III deals with school boards, which have been opposed by the Labour party. In my view they are a significant success. The Bill could be criticised, as I said earlier, for missing an opportunity to strengthen school boards. We could have ensured that head teachers were obliged to submit to school boards all their funding requirements under devolved school management. That would have given school boards some teeth and perhaps encouraged others to join them.

If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would pay some attention—

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend for his attention. I should like him to look again at the requirement in schedule 4(3) that all councillors in a school catchment area should have the right to participate on the school board. In some areas, far too many councillors would qualify, and they would grossly outnumber members of the school board.

Mr. Robertson: That point has often been raised with us. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities asked for the change, and we shall obviously return to the matter in Committee. If my hon. Friend wants to pick up on it then, we shall look at it.

Mr. Gallie: I can think of no better reason for rejecting the proposal than the fact that it has been suggested by COSLA. I suggest that my hon. Friend talks to school board members and the people who are showing interest, listens to what they are saying and accepts their judgments rather than those of COSLA. I accept that it would be reasonable for a local councillor to have an input into a school board. Councillors whose wards include certain schools should have a right to be on their boards. Thereafter, it seems entirely reasonable that others may be invited by the board to specific meetings rather than attend by right.

More could have been made of the use of school buildings. It could have been part of a requirement on local authorities' additional involvement outside normal school times. Perhaps we shall address that opportunity later. We have a heck of a lot of national capital tied up in school buildings and we do not always get maximum return on its use. It may have been difficult to include such matters in the Bill. I recognise that we have to walk before we can run and that we cannot have everything.

I also have a gripe about the fact that there is nothing in the Bill about sports in school, which are a very important part of any school's activities. It would have been nice if something along those lines could have been included. Perhaps we shall look at such issues in the Government's next term of office and introduce changes at that time.

I very much welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's comments on testing. Testing is absolutely essential for the future. It is stupid not to monitor sufficiently young people—the products of our schools. Many successful, quality young people are coming out of our schools. A great majority of them will achieve, but there will always be a significant minority who do not. Testing should be introduced to ensure that such young people can catch up and improve. We must help them. Testing is designed to help not those at the top of the ladder, but those at the bottom.

I was totally confused by some of the topsyturvy suggestions made by Opposition Members—but that is nothing new. I always expect to be confused by Opposition Members who, it seems, do not think as rationally as me.

6.48 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am always grateful to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) for allowing me some time to speak after he has replied to the debate. I always have the feeling that that is what he is doing as he covers every other speech that has been made. As the hon. Gentleman was speaking, I was sure that the Minister was scoring through points that he had intended to make.

It was worth waiting to speak, however. Hon. Members will have to make up their own minds as to whether my speech was worth waiting for. If the Minister manages to stay awake, I am sure that he will take note of the points that I intend to raise and respond to them in his reply.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who unfortunately is not in his place, reminisced about being the Minister responsible for education in Scotland in 1971-74. He spoke about the problems that still occur in schools that were built in the 1950s and 1960s.

This year, my constituency is celebrating the centenary of Maddiston primary school. As the Minister knows because he was good enough to visit Bo'ness school, that building dates from the 1950s or the 1960s. It was made of the wrong kind of concrete and—slowly but surely—it is crumbling and falling apart. My constituents in the Braes—the former East Stirlingshire area—send their children to two schools that are not in my constituency. One third of my constituency does not have a secondary school. Children attend either Woodlands—the former Falkirk high school, which is more than 100 years old, and which moved to different premises some 30 or 40 years ago leaving behind a school that is still in use.

The Minister has also been invited to inspect Graeme high school, the main school for the Braes, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). It used to be the old technical

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school. I understand that he has accepted that invitation, although we are still awaiting a date. The music department used to be the old foundry and the practice rooms are reached by a wooden staircase that should not conform to modern health and safety standards, but the school has to manage with that until the Government provide more resources.

Some of the Bill's provisions are the Government's way of trying to fulfil the aspirations of the right hon. Member for Dumfries in 1971-74 to provide nursery education for every child in Scotland. That did not happen because the Governments of the day—Labour and Conservative—did not put enough money into the project. We are now being offered the voucher system, which is a cheap and shoddy imitation of proper nursery education.

There have been some attacks on the Labour party and I am not unhappy to defend Labour's record in the 1960s as Labour came to power after a long period of Conservative Government. The economy had been destroyed, as had people's hopes and dreams. The 1950s and the 1960s before Labour regained power saw the flight of capital from Britain, and we ended up having to rescue Britain from an incredible balance of payments problem that should have led to immediate devaluation. As the Government and the public were either unaware of the need for that or unwilling to make the political choice, we suffered the consequences in the 1960s and 1970s. The Minister can trot out the figures, but the country was facing economic problems that were created by Conservative profligacy and reliance on a completely free market.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) is not in his place because, as he explained, he has left to chair a Committee. However, he treated us to some Tayside xenophobia. He said that only rural schools in Tayside were worthy of praise.

I was a teacher for 15 years. I taught mainly in special education by choice. My wife is a trained primary teacher and a graduate and now a senior educational officer, and I have spent much time in debate, discussion and observation of the Scottish education at the primary stage and into adulthood.

There are wonderful teachers in wonderful schools throughout Scotland. However, in some schools there are substantial social pressures, both economically and because of the fabric of the schools and the straitened circumstances of people living in the outskirts of Scottish cities and in some Scottish town centres. None of those difficulties will be alleviated by the Bill. People will not be rushing to claim their £1,100 because what they want, and what some local authorities—Labour Conservative and SNP—are providing is proper nursery education.

Everyone is wondering who will suffer when the £1,100 voucher system becomes universal in Scotland. What will happen? The necessary funds to provide proper nursery places—which can cost as much as £3,500—will be shattered into segments of £1,100 and spread around. That will not supplement existing provision, as the hon. Member for Ayr tried to impress on the House, but undermine, destroy and wear away the provision that is already being made by many Scottish local authorities, sometimes under seriously straitened financial circumstances.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: As the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber during my right hon. Friend's opening speech, his comments seem rather strange. Did he not hear that in East Renfrewshire, every holder of a voucher has been guaranteed a nursery place under the scheme and that to date almost three quarters of eligible parents have taken the opportunity of getting a voucher? That does not sit with what he has just said—that parents will not be rushing to get their vouchers. They are doing just that.

Mr. Connarty: The Secretary of State did not answer my question as he did not accept my intervention on that point. I wished to ask him to give me one instance—unlike his surgery tale of a woman who did not get nursery places for her children—of someone saying, "My child has a proper nursery place, but I want to give up that place and take a voucher."

We are talking about an area where there may have been a partnership, as has been explained. I am not saying that there should be no variety, but parents whose children have a nursery place want to hang on to it. When people see the benefits of a proper nursery place, they aspire to that for their children. There is nothing wrong with wanting a halfway house when there is no other provision, but that is not the aspiration of the Opposition. We do not want to cheapen and devalue, but to increase the nursery provision for three and four-year-olds.

Mr. Welsh: There is a flaw in the Government's logic when they assume that a voucher worth £1,100 has the same value in the Gorbals as it has in Eastwood. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be far better if we invested properly in the existing national system. The local authorities are the best providers, giving a high-quality service, but as usual with the present Government, they are under-resourced.

Mr. Connarty: I concur with that succinct and accurate analysis. I am glad that the right hon. Member for Dumfries has returned to the Chamber. I mentioned him when he was not in his place, not in any way to criticise his aspirations, but to point out that since his period in office, the Government have not funded nursery education to the level required to provide what we need—a proper headstart.

I use the word headstart as when I studied for my diploma at university and college, there was a large American project called Headstart. People thought that it was not working because it did not achieve immediate results. As middle-class children with good social backgrounds were doing just as well as if not better than those involved in the project at primary 1 and primary 2, which is elementary 1, elementary 2 and elementary 3 in the United States, funding was discontinued and the programme was run down. However, some 10 years later, the young people who had been involved in Headstart were going to college. They were not just taking a high school diploma, but they were matching their middle-class counterparts and going on to further and higher education in America. Headstart is now being revived in the United States and money is being put into pre-school nursery

education because it extends the learning process and encourages young people to aspire to further and higher education.

Sadly, the Secretary of State made a rather snide and disparaging remark about myself in relation to Stirling university, which he announced would be conducting research into nursery education. As a graduate of Stirling university, I should like to put a few points on record so that he can read them and reconsider his disparaging remarks about whether my work at Stirling university and since leaving gives me some credentials to speak about higher and further education.

I was an undergraduate at Stirling from 1967 to 1972. In 1970-71 I was elected student president of the university, and in 1983-84 I was elected honorary president or rector. I am currently a member of the university conference, as is the Secretary of State for Scotland as a local Member of Parliament.

The Secretary of State may have been making the same mistake as his Conservative colleagues in Falkirk, who tried to insinuate that I was at the university at the time of the debacle of the Queen's visit in 1972. At a funeral in Stirling last week, I was told by an elderly lady that I had been blamed for that. But I had been living in Canterbury from June of that year, and I had not been back to Stirling. *[Interruption.]* The Minister with responsibility for education, housing and fisheries should listen, as his colleagues are making these remarks. The members of Falkirk council have a poster—

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Get on with it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I think that I can be trusted to look after these matters, rather than a junior Minister speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr. Connarty: I shall deal with the matter quickly. The Secretary of State made an unfounded and disparaging remark that should be discounted, as the Conservative members of Falkirk council now accept that I was not at the university at the time of the Queen's visit. I am proud of my contribution since then. I was the leader of Stirling council, and we built the management centre that the Secretary of State is always describing as an example of private enterprise and universities working together. The council has continued to work with the university since then.

Part I of the Bill deals with the Scottish Qualifications Authority. It would be unfortunate if there was to be a split in the all-party support for that authority, as we had—believe it or not—before the creation of Scottish Enterprise all-party support for the idea of the Scottish Development Agency and the Manpower Services Commission joining together. Sadly, the Government underfunded Scottish Enterprise and, as a result, the quality of training has been poorer than would have been the case had the two organisations remained apart.

My worry is that the Scottish Qualifications Authority will be underfunded by the Government. As a result, we will not have parity of esteem—something to which we all aspire—so that vocational and academic qualifications will be as one. We will instead have a spectrum of qualifications, with academic qualifications at the top and vocational qualifications at the bottom. The members of the body should not be appointed by the Secretary of State, who may be driven by an ideology that may not be in the interests of all the people of Scotland who want vocational or academic qualifications. The danger is that there will be pressure to focus on either of the areas, and the body will not give parity of esteem.

I believe that the Scottish Qualifications Authority will rely for its success on the resourcing of "Higher Still". Everybody to whom I have talked about "Higher Still" has said that although the pilot projects have been fine, there is no indication in the Government's budgets that the scheme is to be continuously resourced. I am in daily contact with people in the academic world—particularly in high schools—and they are not buoyant about the scheme. Many are saying that although they have been involved in the pilots, they will not continue with "Higher Still" unless they receive the resources. If the resources are not provided, there will be no proper training and the scheme will stumble. Problems will be created by the Government cutting corners, as that will result in a cut in quality.

I am glad that the Minister responded as he did to his hon. Friend the Member for Ayr on the accreditation organisation, as I was going to point out that City and Guilds has re-established itself in Scotland. In addition, the Royal Society of Arts—which does tremendous work in commercial and office training—plays a fundamental part in the transition from school to a working environment, and often to further and higher education, for many young people. I am glad that the Minister recognises that.

We do not want one organisation and a single approach but many approaches, all of which people can take at different times in their lives. I remember meeting young people who had not gone to high school, but who were studying in university—and in the library where I and my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) studied for our highers—for their PhDs. They were studying in the library because their family circumstances did not allow them to work at home. There are many routes to further and higher education, and I hope that the Scottish Qualifications Authority will not cut them.

I have some reservations about the authority—for example, it will not have enough local authority members. The hon. Member for Ayr suggested that the Government take the view that COSLA is an antagonist—although perhaps not an enemy—and would not be included among the Government's automatic choices for consultees. That worries me, because I believe that COSLA is a responsible organisation. Education authorities have made many changes—as a result not of Government pressure, but of pressure from academics, researchers and parents, whom they take seriously and try to represent. COSLA should be involved in that organisation. It has bid for a certain percentage of places and while I would not go so far as to say that we should accede to its request, I believe that COSLA should be represented in large numbers.

It has been suggested that training providers should be predominant in the accreditation committee, and that should be looked at seriously by the Government. We have talked in the Scottish Grand Committee about the Fast-trac scheme in Fife, and there is a strong view there that we should talk to those who provide rather than intermediaries or academics. The Government should make sure that an adequate number of places are provided

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for providers. The hon. Member for Ayr referred to providers in universities, but I believe that those who turn the aspirations of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds into NVQs should also be included.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Bill requires that the Secretary of State must consult widely before making any appointment. Therefore, the matter to which the hon. Gentleman is referring is catered for in the Bill.

Mr. Connarty: I am grateful for that assurance, but it has been said that consultation under this Government—particularly in Scotland—is someone being asked for his opinion and then being told that he will get what the Government planned anyway. We can think back to the Scottish local government legislation, when there was clear opposition from the Scottish people to the proposal. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has pointed out also that the people of Scotland do not want nursery vouchers, but the Government have introduced them anyway. I am glad that the Secretary of State will consult, but I hope that he will do more and will take on board the aspirations of those whom he consults.

As someone who worked in the field for 15 years, I am concerned that there is no commitment in the Bill to special educational needs qualifications. I found it difficult to shoe-horn the abilities and the massive and complex difficulties of my students aged between 11 and 19 into five-to-14. That was a wonderful innovation, but it did not fit the needs of those children. Often, individual children had programmes designed specifically for them. Yet at the end of the programme, we were asked to grade them A, B or C. It was not sensible. I hope that some prescriptive protection can be provided in Committee, or perhaps graded qualifications in special educational needs could be developed to help people pass through the system and fit into five-to-14 and "Higher Still".

Children with special educational needs are often below the basic level of the standard grade qualification that they are trying to achieve. But they want to achieve something, because a child with special educational needs makes just as much effort to get to a pre-general stage—never mind the general stage of a standard grade. The Minister, who was a teacher, knows that. I hope that the organisation will look at that matter.

I will not deal with the Bill in order, because I want to get to the meat at the end. I wish to refer to the alterations to school boards. The school board system is not massively succesful, as the hon. Member for Ayr said. It has many flaws, and it staggers and stumbles in different areas. People are co-opted on to boards because they cannot get anyone to volunteer. Some areas are not represented, with people from one community on school boards while those from other communities are not. That is no substitute for a statutory right for every parent to have access to and influence on what happens in a school. For instance, clause 28(8) allows certain people to stay on in post until the next election even though they have ceased to have any parental or other connection. Those who have volunteered to be co-opted may have wives or husbands on the board; they can stay on until they eventually have to leave. The Government are responding to the problem of gaps appearing in the school board system. The hon. Member for Ayr talked about budgets and expenditure as providing a role for the boards, but that could end up with people arguing about the price of the postage stamps instead of concentrating on things that affect the school.

I want the whole ethos of schools to be discussed. All the research shows that school boards should not feel detached from school affairs but should help teachers in their tasks. That would give them a real role in a school's aspirations.

Perhaps school boards do not represent the right way forward in any event. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East has been looking seriously—while drawing up a consultation document—at other approaches. We need to revitalise the relationship between parents and schools, not just to patch up the holes in the system.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman is being a little insulting to school boards when he talks of discussions of postage stamps and so on. Boards are interested in the books and equipment that schools use and in other major issues. My experience is that they like to feel that they are making a contribution in that way.

Mr. Connarty: My experience is somewhat different. If the Minister cares to visit Graeme High, just as he visited Bo'ness in my constituency, he will find that the school board and action group want to discuss not the internal affairs of the school but the need for more resources—just as happened at Bo'ness. The group's members do not want to sit down with the headmaster to divide up the school's resources—they trust the professionals to do that well—but they do want to make the case for more and better resources. If the Government recognised the validity of allowing people some degree of subsidiarity so that they could speak out democratically, they might get on better.

Clause 32 might be aptly named the Balfron clause, as it clearly stems from the Secretary of State's experience at Balfron in the west of his constituency. For some time now people have been crossing the border from Strathclyde mainly because, once over the hill, people look down on Balfron in the Blane valley, not at Glasgow. I was the leader of the local council for 10 years so I know the area well. I should like to record my commendation of Jim Fleming, the head teacher whom I knew for many years as a fellow modern studies teacher—just as the Minister used to be before his temporary incarnation as a politician. I am sure that he will go back to teaching when he leaves this place—

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am too old.

Mr. Connarty: This place's loss would be modern studies' gain. I have heard no criticism of the hon. Gentleman's period as a modern studies teacher, although I have heard him criticised as a Minister.

The school attracts people, but many schools in the same situation attract so many that they squeeze out their local catchment area pupils. Clause 32 is therefore long overdue.

Today, the Secretary of State made his usual and typical disparaging personal remark about me, but we are old sparring partners. My problem with what he had to say

was echoed earlier by the hon. Member for Ayr. The right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that the nursery places being provided are additional. They are certainly additional in the pilot schemes, but that is what bribery is all about. The same happened with the capital offered to opting out schools in England and Wales. Such schools are now being told that there will be no more bribes, with the result that many of them have run into difficulties.

It is easy to get people to take up an option that includes more money. The councils that have taken the money have clearly decided that although they do not like the political ideology behind them they need the extra cash offered in the pilot schemes. So their choice was between taking some money or taking nothing—and some took it. I do not wish to act as judge and jury; I do not know what pressures such councils have been subjected to, or how they have resolved them.

What is clear is that, after the pilots are over, the provision will have to be delivered universally, and if £1,100 per pupil is universally offered it will not amount to that much money on top of what is already spent by local authorities on nursery education. Both the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Ayr know that. Just because everyone queues up for vouchers in one local authority area does not mean that that authority will have the money to provide them all with places—certainly not of the quality to which the right hon. Member for Dumfries aspires. The pre-five organisations in my area, too, know that the provision will not be adequate.

As for clause 24, the administration of the voucher system constitutes a blank cheque for political interference. Some of the clauses in this Bill smack not of a nanny state but of a dogmatic state, because they allow the Secretary of State first to decide on the requirements and then to change them at any time after payment: if the requirements are not met, the money can be called in again. It seems that the Secretary of State can change the rules on his personal whim. He may, for instance, decide that too much partnership with local authorities should result in a shift to the private sector. Failing that, the money can be taken away. There will be continual pressures of this kind, which is why I hope that clause 24 will be examined in great detail by the Standing Committee.

The safeguards written into the Bill may, according to clause 24(2)(b),

"be varied, waived or removed."

In effect, the Secretary of State can apply pressure and then take away the safeguards written into the agreements with the people who set up the system. The whole thing is fraught with difficulties, and clauses 24 and 25 are dangerous parts of the Bill.

Clause 25 deals with setting up a nursery voucher company, Capita. I have visited the Student Loans Company so I know what a disaster it is. This one will be the same. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton described the complexities which the Government say do not exist, and I certainly cannot see how the system can be run on spending of £22 per person out of the £1,100. That represents £1 million of the £70 million. It is ridiculous to believe that an organisation can be run on that, although no doubt a private company will be set up if the banks think that there is money to be made—just as they did with Motability. I predict that problems will follow.

Clause 26 refers to the Secretary of State's ability to release social security information about people. That is worrying. The defence will be that information was released unknowingly to third parties. The Government tell us that they want freedom and choice, and that they want to get the state off people's backs, but clause 26 allows personal information to be passed on to others.

The point has been made again and again that vouchers do not mean places—they just mean vouchers. Because they want to be seen to have introduced broader nursery education for more people, the Government are willing to spread the available jam more and more thinly. The result will be something that sustains no one; it will not achieve the impact to which Headstart aspired in America, or even the impact achieved by the pre-fives groups in Strathclyde and in other local authorities. Yet the Secretary of State is trying to sell the idea to the people of Scotland.

Does the Minister really believe that this £1,100 will buy the same quality nursery provision as local authorities currently make? If he does, his view will be subjected to scrutiny during the pilot period and will be found wanting.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman does not have to take my word for it: the National Audit Office has said that £1,100 will pay for everything except the most high-quality and the most expensive places—the voucher scheme was never intended to pay for those places. The independent National Audit Office is saying this, not me.

Mr. Connarty: It is the independent National Audit Office for England and Wales. I would like to see someone from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy or the Comptroller of Audit in Scotland do it. I remember that when we had the debate about the cost of local authority reorganisation, CIPFA put out a paper to show that the reorganisation cost will be much dearer than the one put forward by the Government. The Government's chosen consultant, Touche Ross, borrowed the Government's watch and told them the time the Government wanted to hear.

Mr. Robertson: Is the hon. Gentleman not being a wee bit arrogant to think that he knows better than the National Audit Office?

Mr. Connarty: I was the treasurer of my council and I was the deputy leader of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, so I suppose I can be a little arrogant in thinking that local government experience may outweigh the accountants' slide rule, but we will test that as time goes on.

The Secretary of State spoke about people being brainwashed. I was amazed by the statement. When it was pointed out that everyone is against the proposal, the Secretary of State said that even the parents and people of Scotland have been brainwashed by the Labour party. That is an incredible insult. I see one of the English Members, the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), backing up the Minister and nodding his head. That shows that he does not know much about Scottish society because in Scottish society there is a common weal, a belief among the people, that there are certain aspirations that we should all share. If we do not share those aspirations, or are willing to tread on them, we are betraying not just ourselves but the society in which we live.

[Mr. Connarty]

I believe that that society aspires to have the best for the largest number of people and it wants to give a chance to the 30 per cent.—it is 30 per cent. at the moment—who are not getting a chance in the Scottish society that we have created over the past 17 years. We are doing it for moral and emotional reasons and for reasons of logic. But there are sound economic reasons as well. Society will carry those 30 per cent. on our backs—through transfer payments, and through social unrest, disruption and disfunctionality for the next generation. I believe that people want to see an effort being made to right that wrong in Scotland. I do not think that the people are in any way brainwashed. The Secretary of State said that the parents are brainwashed and that the voters are brainwashed. The Conservative party is down to 12 per cent. in the polls in Scotland, not because of brainwashing but because people are sick to their teeth of this ideology.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend will know that I was a member of Strathclyde regional council for almost 10 years. I remember what happened in 1978—and we thought that they were bleak years. At that time, Scottish education was renowned the world over and we were praised for the standard that we achieved. We are on rocky ground after 16 years of Tory Government. Education resources are constantly eroded by the Government. The morality of the Government is now in deep question by the people who deliver educational services in Scotland.

Mr. Connarty: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I hold up one hope. I believe that we survived it. The innovation that I have seen in local government and in education over the past 16 or 17 years has been tremendous. It is not driven by the Government—in a sense people are showing innovation to prevent the damage that the Government wish to do. Education is hit hard because it is the largest and most labour-intensive part of a local authority budget. It is easy to pressure that budget by taking a few hundred thousand pounds out here and a few hundred thousand pounds out there. I know that every local authority is going through traumas in education at the moment because of the cut in the budget, because of local government reorganisation and because of the paltry sum given to them by the Secretary of State.

I believe that there is brainwashing: I think the Secretary of State and some of his colleagues were brainwashed when they went to St. Andrews. The political economy lecturers were Hayekians—now called the Austrian school—and they proselytised the theories of Hayek to their students. They were taken up by the Secretary of State and others. If one looks back at the so-called Thatcher years they were years when the Hayek model of the economy—a free market, deregulated economy—was to the fore.

There has been brainwashing, but it has been of Ministers and the Secretary of State—who has enthusiastically talked for that model. The past 17 years have shown that that model has denuded Britain of its ability to survive in the world, and reduced the capacity of the economy. We are now 35th in the league of investment in education and 18th in the prosperity league in the world. That is not something that happened because the world turned against us—it happened because those theories were carried to the extreme. It is not wrong to have a mix, but it was carried to the extreme—where only the free-market model was acceptable.

I do not believe that the aspiration of nursery education is to have, as the Secretary of State said, a system where some kind of overriding social strategy allows people to parachute in because they have a designated social need and take a place away from a local resident. We have to get the balance right. In Central region there have been revisions of the policy since the new councils came in and they are trying to get the balance correct between social need and the aspirations of local people. One should not be denied by the other.

Another point continually made by the Secretary of State and other Ministers is that we have a voucher system for training and it works. That is not true: we have a voucher system for training, but it does not work. I have spent 18 months studying the skill seekers programme and looking at the aspirations. The people who thought it up—I said this in the Scottish Grand Committee—said that it will work properly only if there is intermediate employment for people to train with their job. Training on its own will not create people who can get a job. We need to get the other half of the equation correct.

In Fast-trac we have a model that we can look at. Fife Enterprise has admitted that it does not have anything going for special educational needs. The Minister said that the nursery providers said that they can cope in the pilots with special educational needs with the funding that is available. That is not true because when we look at the needs of people post-school it is taking 40 per cent. of some skill seekers programme budgets to provide for the 15 per cent. of people who are designated as having special educational needs in some areas.

Mr. Raymonds Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Connarty: I will let the Minister intervene in a moment. I have been looking closely at the figures. In one local enterprise company area they aspired to have 1,000 people in the skill seekers programme with 52 per cent. of them in a job with training. When I inquired, they announced that they had reached the target—in fact, they were over it, with 56 per cent. of people in training. When I looked I found that the total number in the programme was not 1,000 but 700, so it was 56 per cent. of 700, not 56 per cent. of the 1,000 originally targeted. That is the picture throughout Scotland, apart from Grampian, which has been running the longest and has the most buoyant economy. I am not against the voucher system in training—it just needs to have Government input at the right resource level to provide jobs that people can then take their training into.

Mr. Robertson: I tried to intervene on the hon. Gentleman when he was talking about special educational needs. He has to be consistent in this. Ten minutes ago he was lecturing us and saying that local authorities knew best. Local authorities are now saying that they can cope with special educational needs and he is saying that they do not know what they are talking about.

Mr. Connarty: The simple thing for the Minister to look at is what it costs to look after one special

educational needs pupil compared with a pupil in a standard secondary school. It costs £12,000 for a place in the school where I taught for 15 years and it costs an average of £3,000 for a secondary education place. The size of the budget disparity is enormous. I think that special educational needs will suffer. They will suffer because the Government aspire to give this voucher only to four-year-olds.

Every single authority that has looked seriously at a pre-five strategy—through the social work department, and the special educational needs provision, and the psychological services—is doing a complete screening of its younger people and is looking for people with special needs. Problems with dyslexia, dysphasia and minor cerebral palsy are being revealed in this screening. They are the people who are getting priority at the moment in local authority schemes.

If the Minister tells me that the Government will provide for every young person who comes through that screening with special educational needs the extra resources required so that they can start at the age of three or even earlier in home-based pre-school experiences he will at least have said something positive today. If he is not going to do that now, he can do it in his reply. We will need more than £1,100 if we are going to do that. The Government do not recognise that people are going for three-year-olds not just to win votes but because the earlier we intervene in the pre-school experience the better we can do what we intend to do.

As to the idea of regulating testing in secondary schools, the Minister's contention—he said it again earlier from a sedentary position—is that an S1-S2 national testing programme is the only way to get added value in S1 and S2. His mythological education authority in Tayside is not the same as the one that I have heard my colleagues from Tayside speak about. There are constant continual assessments as part of S1 and S2—some in the five-to-14 mode and some in the S1-S2 mode.

Teachers do not survive in the classroom if they do not conduct tests because they will have no information upon which to base further work with their pupils. As a former teacher, I am sure that the Minister tested his pupils regularly to see how well they were doing. The Government put about that mythology because they want to conduct a propaganda and an ideological battle. They do not want to accept that the five-to-14 programme has changed things fundamentally and that the S1 and S2 experience will continue to change for young people. The ethos in primary schools, using all the modes of five-to-14, will continue into S1 and S2.

The idea that any teacher could continue to teach for two years without assessing his or her pupils and using that assessment, as the Minister said, to diagnose their needs, to discover their weaknesses and provide educational experiences that will correct them is nonsense. A barrage of tests or a national testing programme has been put up only because the Secretary of State believes that there is some latent desire in the community for him to champion the idea of grading, setting and streaming. I do not think that there is that desire. I think that the Secretary of State will come a cropper, as he did—as my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton pointed out—when he tried to do that in primary schools.

In that case, the assessment examples were absorbed into local authorities and worked alongside their continuous assessment and testing programme. I watched that happen in the schools in which I taught and I watched it happen within education authorities that I knew very well. I hope that this mad, hare-brained idea will be absorbed into the continuous assessment programme of secondary schools in Scotland at S1 and S2 if there is some benefit to be gained from national test items.

The real question is how much longer the people of Scotland must suffer from the fanatical zealotry coming out of St. Andrews. That mad Hayekian model of the economy filtered through the Adam Smith Institute and into the heart and the mind of the Conservative party in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State says that he went to Glasgow, but he is obviously following in the footsteps of another influence. Perhaps he has not read Hayek—I do not know whether he has read any fundamental economic books. However, the Secretary of State has. He has published little articles for the Adam Smith Institute which show quite clearly where he is coming from—whether it is competitive tendering or the market for nursery vouchers. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton exposed the fact that the Secretary of State still aspires to a market for secondary education and higher education vouchers.

It is logical that we need a full partnership. It cannot be a bit of a partnership with the people whom the Government allow in and believe that they can work with; it must be a partnership with all those who care about, and have aspirations for, our children's future. I do not see any of that in the Bill. The Government have tried to slip in unnecessary and unwanted voucher and testing schemes in a Bill which just tinkers with school boards and pulls together the general aspiration to have one qualifications authority in Scotland. It is a shoddy piece of work. The Government have been found out and the Conservatives will lose the next election as a result.

7.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Education has always been a Scottish priority: it is an important part of our life, outlook and culture. Our system is basically strong, but it is under-resourced. I believe that investment in Scotland's education system will pay massive dividends.

I make a plea on behalf of the Scottish Pre-School Play Association. That organisation provides quality assurance and training schemes and has 3,000 groups throughout Scotland which represent excellent value for money. It is the largest single pre-school carer and education organisation in Scotland and it needs about £500,000 to build on its existing high quality service. I was shocked to learn that it receives only 37 per cent. of the funding received by its equivalent organisation in England and Wales, and only 13 per cent. of the funding given to the equivalent organisation in Northern Ireland. I ask the Minister to provide that core funding to the SPPA, as a small investment in such a tried, trusted and successful organisation will reap rich dividends in the long term.

As Scottish education generally has received poor treatment from the Conservative Government, it is incumbent on Scottish Members of Parliament to do our utmost to prevent the Government from inflicting further damage on education provision in Scotland. The Minister

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

will be relieved to hear that I do not oppose everything in the Bill. The establishment of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the principle of a single authority are welcomed conditionally. I say "conditionally" because I do not want to see that body become another quango filled with Tory yes-men. We shall watch carefully to ensure that Lord Lindsay honours his commitment, made during debate in another place, to consult properly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about the SQA's membership. There must be adequate provision to ensure that the merger between the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council occurs smoothly and with minimum disruption both to staff and to those who benefit from the service.

I shall focus on part II of the Bill, which refers to education for children under school age. That is a much greater concern. Although the Bill states that it relates to the provision of grants and social security information to pre-school education providers, we know that they are simply mechanisms for facilitating the Government's unwanted and unnecessary voucher scheme. It is somewhat devious and deceitful of the Government to obscure that fact by not referring explicitly to the voucher scheme.

The Scottish National party is strongly in favour of expanding pre-school education for children under five. We made a detailed pledge to do so in our costed budget proposals, with a commitment to spend an extra £194 million on pre-school education in the first four years of an independent SNP Government. That would ensure a nursery place for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that when those budget proposals were independently costed it was found that they would create an £8 billion deficit?

Mr. Welsh: That figure exists only in the Minister's imagination. If one stands upside down with one's head at a 45-degree angle and imagines a Tory wonderland, one might arrive at £8 billion, but the reality is that the Minister is a Scottish politician who takes every opportunity to downgrade and debase his country. He cannot believe that, of all the countries of western Europe, only Scotland would run an £8 billion deficit given all of our resources. It has been shown clearly that Scotland has a budget surplus.

The Minister plays down his country because he sees this place as providing his sole career opportunity, but he will not be in Government after the next election, and I hope that, following a future Scottish election, all those who care about Scotland will return to Scotland to legislate on behalf of the Scottish people in accordance with their wishes. If the Government had listened to the Scottish people for one second, this nonsense would not be headed towards the statute book.

The Minister has redefined the word "consultation": he will listen to what everyone says and then ignore them. We do not have government: we have dictation. That poses a danger to every citizen in a representative parliamentary democracy. The Minister does not like that, but he sparked those comments with his distorted view of his country's economy. He does not recognise Scotland's true wealth and he should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is living in fantasy land. They are not my figures: they are from the Fraser of Allander Institute, which every Opposition Member has quoted in the House at some stage.

Mr. Welsh: The figures have been demolished absolutely. If one stands on one's head, squints a lot and uses one's imagination, one might arrive at an £8 billion deficit, but it is strange that the Minister believes that Scotland is the only country in Europe that would be too poor to run its own affairs: only a Unionist could dream that up, because the reality is very different and the Scottish people know it.

We not only oppose the Government and all their works; we believe that the proposed voucher scheme is morally wrong and completely impractical. It undermines the principle of universality in our education system and the ability of local authorities to maintain existing levels of pre-school provision, which are already under strain due to lack of resources. The Minister does not even understand the basic principles of the education system through which he went and through which the majority of our children go. Those principles have always informed that system and made it strong.

It is widely acknowledged that the £1,100 value of each voucher is not enough to cover a full-time nursery place. The Educational Institute of Scotland estimates that the cost is about £3,000 in the Strathclyde region. In the Select Committee, the Minister himself acknowledged that the voucher will cover only a part-time place. That sums up the Government's attitude to the situation. It is ludicrous to suppose, as the scheme does, that the cost of educating every child is the same. For children with special needs, the real cost of providing even a part-time place is well over £1,100. We heard vague noises from Secretary of State today about special needs children, but that is not good enough. I hope that when the Minister winds up he will give us more than vague noises of concern about special needs. The £1,100 voucher will not cover the necessary educational provision for that important and vulnerable group. I wish to see positive proposals made on that subject before the Bill becomes law.

Better-off families have the option of topping up the value of the voucher, but that option is not open to most families whose need is usually greater. The Government's policy is socially divisive and will not meet educational need. Pre-school education is supposed to begin the process of trying to create a level playing field for children, regardless of background. It is not supposed to reinforce existing inequalities. A £1,100 voucher will not have the same value in the Gorbals as it will in East Renfrew or Eastwood.

The scheme will be specifically aimed at children in their pre-school year, but it will fail to guarantee quality education for all. The English Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment, was forced to concede that possession of a voucher will not guarantee that four-year-olds will be granted a nursery place. Will the Minister concede that the same applies in Scotland? It should not.

Mr. Robertson: Why is the hon. Gentleman flailing around for an example in England to rubbish the scheme

when there is an example in Scotland in East Renfrewshire? Every child who has a voucher has been guaranteed a place. Why does not he use that as an example and stop flailing around in England?

Mr. Welsh: With his prize test cases, the Under-Secretary of State may be able to achieve those results, but can he replicate that throughout the country? His English colleague cannot. I merely repeated the words of his English colleague who put the scheme into practice and found it wanting. If the scheme fails, I do not want it to be inflicted on Scotland, but the Under-Secretary of State clearly views the situation differently.

Nursery education should be a natural part of our existing national education system, which has a tradition from elementary through to university education. Nursery education should be slotted into the existing Scottish philosophy and system. That would guarantee quality and give assurances to all Scottish parents, who want a system run by the Scottish local authorities which they elect and trust. Scottish parents can put faith in the quality of the product of their local authorities. Instead, the Government are pursuing their economic dogma with a fragmented, socially divisive scheme that will be sheared off from the mainstream provision of education in Scotland. We have already seen the havoc wreaked on the national health service by the imposition of a purchaser-provider split in the delivery of health care. We have witnessed an explosion of bureaucracy which will be repeated in pre-school education if the scheme goes ahead.

The Government like to talk about efficiency. The Secretary of State mentioned 2 per cent. administration costs, but we should consider the process that he is about to inflict on us. Parents will have to request application forms, complete them and send them to the private company that is handling the scheme. That company, Capita, will send out the vouchers which the parents will take to the provider in the private, voluntary or public sector with whom they hope to enrol their children. The provider will then send the vouchers to the local authority, which will gather all the vouchers it receives and send them to Capita. Capita will do the calculations and send them to the Scottish Office, which will send the grants to the local authority. The local authority will then have to distribute the money to the providers according to the number of vouchers received. That bureaucratic nightmare will be repeated three times a year, once in each term. Does the Minister call that efficient? How does he think that it can be run cheaply?

That description does not even take into account the chaos that will result from the parents' confusion about the working of such a complicated system. I will use the English example again because the scheme has been put into practice there. *[Interruption.]* Would the Minister care to listen? I repeat that I will use the English example because schools there have had inflicted on them what the Minister is trying to enforce in Scotland. After the pilot scheme was introduced in March, the Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment, was forced to admit that parents were confused about the application process. Almost a third of parents failed to apply and there is no reason to assume that the situation would be any different in Scotland, because the scheme will be the same.

The voucher process is outrageous and expensive and it will impose market conditions where no market should be. It will inevitably divert vital resources from the task at hand—the universal provision of top quality education for pre-school children. Resources will be taken from that, not given to it. The voucher scheme marks yet another stage in the Tory Government's war against Scotland's local authorities. Instead of using that valuable asset to provide services for the people of Scotland, the Government bypass, under-resource and attack local government. That is a mistake.

Questions must be raised about the honesty of the pilot scheme. Will the Minister confirm the basis on which the pilot scheme will be independently researched and evaluated? The participating authorities are not representative of local authorities as a whole. They tend to have low existing provision for pre-school education. The evaluation must therefore measure what can be achieved by spending £1,100 per pupil and whether that matches the high standards in local authorities with more widespread provision. The evaluation should be honest and compare like with like. I do not believe that the £1,100 voucher will ever come close to matching the existing provision, nor will it be adequate for the task that will be set.

In the Lords Select Committee in Glasgow, the Under-Secretary of State dodged Lord Addington's question about whether the whole scheme would be scrapped if, after independent evaluation, the pilot scheme is deemed to have failed. If the Minister cannot give that assurance, how can we believe that the evaluation will be independent? If the evaluation shows that the scheme is not up to standard, will the Minister guarantee to scrap it?

Mr. Robertson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the evaluation will be real, thorough and intensive. It will be completely independent and we are soon to announce the identity of all those involved in the committee that will carry out the evaluation. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the English example, with a third of parents not applying for vouchers. In Scotland 75 per cent. of eligible parents have applied for vouchers, so why does he go on about England?

Mr. Welsh: In England the scheme has already been inflicted and we can see it in practice. Is scrapping the scheme an option? The Under-Secretary of State has ducked the question. If the independent evaluation finds that the scheme is not up to scratch, will the Minister undertake to scrap it?

Mr. Robertson: We shall conduct a full evaluation of every aspect of the scheme, but the early reports show that it will be a roaring success.

Mr. Welsh: The Minister has failed to answer the question yet again.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): This exchange about the evaluation of the scheme is interesting. Earlier in the debate the Secretary of State put much emphasis on the tests that would take place at S1 and S2. We all recognise that those tests are important, but the Secretary of State could not tell us the cost of the tests. I hope that everyone in the House recognises that the earlier a child with special needs is assessed, the better. I should like the Minister to tell us, in his closing speech, how much money will be spent on the administration of tests at

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

S1 and S2 and how that will compare with the administrative costs of the nursery voucher scheme that he is now trying to implement.

Mr. Welsh: My hon. Friend poses important questions, which I hope will be answered. Testing at S1 and S2 is no small change but a fundamental alteration that will affect the system from top to bottom. There is already a massive gravitational pull towards standard grade and higher for all Scottish school children who reach that stage. If the Minister proposes to introduce national examinations at S1 and S2, the gravitational pull will be increased—and that will have repercussions throughout the system. I should like the Minister to explain the costings in detail and to answer my hon. Friend's questions. The Government refuse to listen. Instead, they impose their personal dogma on Scottish needs.

The timing of the pilot scheme also raises questions as to its genuineness. The independent evaluation is not due to report until August 1997; yet under the existing timetable local authorities will have to start issuing vouchers the previous May. If the pilot is to be genuine, the Government must await the evaluation—or is this further evidence to justify our suspicion that any negative evaluation will be ignored by a Government who are determined to press on and impose their dogmatic views, despite the wishes of parents and professionals in education? The consultation process clearly lacked all substance, as the scheme is going ahead despite its rejection by more than 80 per cent. of the respondents. Will the so-called independent evaluation also be devoid of substance, or will the Minister commit himself to adhering to the reality of its findings?

I am concerned about the continued erosion of democratic local authority control in state education provision, and about the role of a private company in the scheme's administration. To whom will that company be accountable? If it is to the Scottish Office, that rules out any accountability to the Scottish people. If the Government get their way on this important matter, it will be the start of a programme of back-door privatisation of Scotland's education system. The Secretary of State has clearly shown the way he wants to go. We can expect the voucher system to be extended to primary and secondary schools, because that is where the right hon. Gentleman's dogma leads him. Such a development would be against the wishes of the Scottish people and a disaster for Scotland's education system.

The Secretary of State pretended that there is no assessment of pupils' progress and that parents have no knowledge of their children's attainment. Clearly that is nonsense. The right hon. Gentleman intends to introduce compulsory tests at S1 and S2—not as diagnostic tests, but similar to standard grades and highers. The Secretary of State used that analogy. Standard grades lead to highers, and highers are required for higher education and university. Are we to assume that the Secretary of State's new examinations will be a prerequisite for entry into standard grades?

If the Government go ahead with that further fundamental change, we shall be entering a new rigid and regimented world. It is a pity that the Government did not consult parents as I am sure that they would have given a short, sharp answer. The overwhelming majority of responses to the consultation were against the introduction of a voucher scheme, mirroring the opposition to the Secretary of State's previous test ideas. All local authorities, including the four bribed into participating in the pilot, oppose the scheme. Scotland does not want Government-imposed schemes, but because of the union with England they are again being imposed on us.

One Minister, in his evidence to the Select Committee, had the audacity to say:

"At the end of the day, it is up to us to manage our own affairs and to keep Scottish education up there at the very top."

The Government do not want Scotland to manage its own affairs—and if that Minister has his way, Scottish education's opportunity to stay at the top will be diminished because of fragmentation and the failure of the schemes that the Secretary of State is trying to impose.

My hon. Friends and I—joined, I presume, by other Opposition Members—intend to keep Scottish education to the forefront. Those of us who care about Scottish education are forced to apply time and energy to resisting the Westminster Government's attempts to undermine Scotland's education system. We are forced on to the defensive by alien ideas. The imposition of the Government's insidious scheme is yet another example of why it is so vital that decisions affecting Scotland are made not just in Scotland but by the Scottish people.

7.54 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Conservative Members are in a quandary: while trying to praise their Government's achievements—if their record over the past 17 years can be called such—they keep producing criticisms. The country needs to be forcefully reminded that, for the past 17 years, Conservative Ministers have been responsible for running Scottish education. Most of the faults and problems that exist in the system, if not all, can be traced directly back to Tory Ministers. It is irrelevant to talk about a Labour Government of 17, 18 or 20 years ago, and it shows the paucity of Ministers' ideas and their need to cover up their own record.

Vouchers are part of the Government's agenda of dogma. There is consensus not only in Scotland but in the rest of the United Kingdom on the benefits of high-quality education nursery education and of supporting its expansion. Instead of building on that consensus and achieving unity of purpose, the Government seek to maintain their dogmatic programme and attitudes to education in general and to nursery education in particular.

The roots go back to a Conservative party conference at which a weak Prime Minister tried to sustain his party's support by making all sorts of off-the-cuff pledges—which he handed to Ministers to implement. Almost immediately after the Prime Minister's commitment at a Conservative party conference to provide "over time"—his usual qualification—pre-school places for all four-year-olds, the Secretary of State for Education clearly expressed her doubts about the practicality of a voucher system. She quickly had to come into line, to fulfil the Prime Minister's commitment to a political gathering—which shows the Conservatives' attitude to education and most other issues.

The Government's next step was to issue, in August 1995, a consultation document on a voucher scheme in Scotland. The Secretary of State for Scotland announced

that he would be inviting the new unitary authorities and existing island councils to apply to participate in a pilot voucher scheme in advance of national coverage, and that £3 million of new money would be available for that purpose. Compare the availability of that new money with the Government's priorities, particularly in Scotland. They could find £3 million for a nursery voucher initiative and for the assisted places scheme, yet when it comes to mainstream education provided by local authorities, it is always the same story—there is not enough money.

Like other hon. Members, I can give more than one example of that in my constituency. Thanks to a Labour Government and Labour-controlled council, the Trinity school in the Cambuslang area of my constituency opened 19 years ago. Unfortunately, that school, together with many others, has been caught by the time scale of a Conservative Government, and still does not have its own playing field. It has a roll of more than 1,200 pupils, but no facilities are available locally. Pupils have to be bussed all over the place to get to sports and playing field facilities. That is an indictment of Conservative Scotland and Conservative education policies in Scotland.

People may laugh, especially those who have absolutely no knowledge of Scotland, its problems and culture, but they would do well to remember that the Conservative party is the biggest danger to the Union, not the Scottish National party. They should pay attention to these debates.

In addition to the pilot scheme and the consultation document, the Government put forward various speeches and other documents in support of their policy initiative, and we awaited the results of the consultation process. Although they may not like it, the fact, according to the Scottish local government information unit and the Education Institute of Scotland, is that more than 80 per cent. of responses to the consultation were against the introduction of the scheme, the main criticism being that such a scheme would drain resources from local authority provision, would introduce the notion of the marketplace into education—that is the real hidden agenda—and be socially divisive, as only relatively affluent parents would be able to top up the cost of their provision.

In the Government's furtherance of their divisive path in Scotland, on 12 December 1995 local authorities were invited to submit proposals for a pilot voucher scheme, and the Scottish Office issued a paper. The Secretary of State announced on 4 March 1996 that the pilot scheme would go ahead in a small number of Scottish unitary authorities.

At one stage, the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State responsible for education clearly stated that the unitary authority of South Lanarkshire had expressed an interest in participating in the scheme. That was clearly untrue, so I raised the matter with the Ministers and received clarification. When South Lanarkshire council received the letter from the Scottish Office, it wrote back—quite properly—to ask for more details about the practicalities. If that council had totally dismissed the letter, it would be described as irresponsible and not fully representing its area, but because it asked for more information, it was accused of supporting Tory policies by wanting to participate in the scheme. I am glad to have this opportunity to clarify South Lanarkshire's record on that.

The Government's determination completely to ignore their own consultation has not been properly explained. Not one Conservative Member has justified their ignoring the consultation, except in terms of, "We know better than everybody else." That sums up their attitude. That is the arrogance of a governor-general who thinks that he is in charge of a colony in the 1930s and 1940s, rather than dealing with the nation and country of Scotland.

The main issues regarding vouchers are hard, if not impossible, to tackle in seeking to amend the skimpy proposals in the Bill, but they are worth pursuing. The Government's determination to go ahead with the proposals despite the rejection by 80 per cent. of those who responded to the consultative document augurs badly for the way in which the scheme, if passed by the House, will start in Scotland and how it will continue. There are a number of holes in the Bill. It is a rag-bag Bill clearly born of dogma.

I have not heard from Ministers any proposals for a clear curricular framework and a guarantee of quality provision. There are no practical details concerning the operation of the scheme—for example, eligibility, identification of parents, flexibility of the voucher, standards of buildings, staff and training of the people involved in providing the seryice. We have heard nothing from Ministers about their ideas on that.

There are practically no details about the administration of the scheme. There are no details of the role and accountability of the private company to be involved. The introduction of a private company into an area where local authorities have played a major role in the provision of nursery education marks a substantial departure, with major implications for the provision of education.

I am not against change or major departures, but surely in Scotland, where there is a large measure of social cohesion, major change—not minor change—especially in the provision of education, should come about only as a result of consensus, which exists in Scotland, to move forward, because the social and, potentially, educational divisiveness of the scheme will allow better-off families to top up the voucher value, and that option is not open to most families. The Government can say what they like, but that option will not be open to the vast majority of parents in Scotland.

As I mentioned earlier, the Government's resources for the scheme—£3 million, plus the amount that they give to the assisted places scheme—clearly marks out their priorities for education in Scotland. In a key phrase, the Secretary of State, in a moment of honesty, said that the existence of the vouchers will spark off providers in the market. He said quite clearly that the market will deal with the fact that vouchers are available.

Opposition Members are accused of dogma, old-fashioned communism, being left-wing, extreme left-wing and the rest, but here we have the Government's dogmatic approach: the market will provide. There was not a word about the standards that the market will provide, about safety or the standards of the education of the most important people in Scotland.

First and foremost, what the Secretary of State did not say—this is behind the Government's dogma—is that the market will provide profits for private individuals and private companies. That is the real thrust of what the Government are doing. The Secretary of State for Scotland says that it is all about choice, but for whom?

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

It is certainly not choice for the vast majority my constituents, or those of most other Scottish Members, or, I dare say, the Minister himself.

I mentioned the Government's hidden agenda. If they can get a wedge of vouchers for nursery education, the next step—as many hon. Members have said today—will be vouchers for primary and secondary education. It is a rush to the market. That is where the Government are going. The only consolation is that the Conservative Government have less than a year to run, and no matter what happens, there will be consensus on the Opposition Benches to ensure that these people are removed before they can do much more damage to Scotland.

The rush to the market does not take into account the impact on those who will be affected. Ministers made no mention, until questioned by Opposition Members, of special needs and vulnerable people. Only when Ministers were put on the spot did we start to get responses from them. It just demonstrates their attitude when they do not feel it important enough to make those points. They have to be questioned and scrutinised by Opposition Members before we can flush them out.

I shall say a few words about the Secretary of State's announcement on testing for S1 and S2. I do not want to pay him too many compliments. Indeed, I am thinking of some insults. It is indicative of his attitude and the way in which he treats the House and the elected representatives on the Opposition Benches that he made his statement without following the proper procedures, without giving the spokespersons from other Opposition parties a chance to examine it and to prepare a response. He hoped to avoid scrutiny. He had little chance of that, but the fact that he tried to treat the House and Opposition Members in that manner says more about him than it does about anyone else.

The proposals for testing show a distinct lack of preparedness in the Government's approach. The Secretary of State was caught off balance. He said that there would be no compulsion—that parents wou'd not be forced to put their children through the S1 and S2 tests. Of course, the right hon. Gentleman had his fingers burnt last time—by the parents in Scotland, not the politicians. The parents rejected his previous proposals for testing when he was Minister of State. Now, he is saying that there will be no compulsion. If he is setting that precedent, there is a chance that the parents will organise mass withdrawals from the tests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) rightly said that the position is ludicrous—is it a voluntary compulsory scheme or a compulsory voluntary scheme? If it is not a statutory scheme, parents may decide en masse not to allow their children to take part in the tests. The whole scheme will then fall down; it will be a debacle. It is a haphazard approach to providing education in Scotland.

As many hon. Members have said, it is the thin end of the wedge. We are being tricked again. If the Government can achieve testing for S1, knowing this Government, the next step will be a requirement that children have to pass the S1 test before they can progress to S2, which they will then need to pass before they can progress to the standard grades. I do not like it, but I understand when Conservative Members who are not Ministers claim that they believe in testing as a principle and say that it is good and healthy. Frankly, I do not trust them.

Mrs. Ewing: I noted that the Minister firmly shook his head in response to some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Should he not now make it quite clear that there is not a progression process through S1, S2 and S3? Should not the Minister firmly state that children will not, on an annual basis, be rejected or accepted for a particular course?

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: It is a pity that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) sought to enter our debate so late in the evening. I earlier gave the assurance that she sought.

Mr. McAvoy: I know that sometimes there can be an element of rough and tumble in the House—I am not one to give much quarter to the SNP as a political party—but there are ways of dealing with interventions and political rumbustiousness. The sort of personal remark that the Minister made does not do him or the House any favours.

Mr. Welsh: The Minister has said that the S1 and S2 exams will not be necessary qualifications to move on to standard grades and higher. However, in rushing this Bill, and not providing any background information, he has failed to mention the enormous repercussions of the examinations for the new syllabuses in terms of books, teacher training, production of questions, staff time and preparation. We have not heard a word about that from the Minister. Surely we deserve some explanation.

Mr. McAvoy: My hon. Friend—for the purposes of this debate, at least—is right. It is an example of the Government's approach. They have introduced a skimpy Bill with skimpy details. Then, under pressure, we get assurances such as that from the Secretary of State, who said that there would be no compulsion. It is a shambles.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) is right about the lack of detail. The Minister, in his less than pleasant response to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), confirmed that there would be no compulsion. The problem is—I am choosing my words carefully—that his record does not inspire any confidence to believe him. I am not referring to him in a personal sense, but as a Conservative Minister dealing with policies in Scotland.

I remember the qualifying examination—the qualye, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) called it. I remember standing in the room while the results were read out. It was a case of separating the sheep from the goats. Every child in the room knew that those who went to the junior secondary school would be the hewers of wood and drawers of water. Those children lucky enough to have passed the exam would go to senior secondary school and have an academic future.

I remember the tears and the tension; children were in a terrible state, and afraid to go home and tell their parents that they had failed. That qualifying examination set in concrete a child's place in society. That is socially

divisive and wrong. Now there is to be a return to a qualifying examination, and it will be socially divisive. Our only consolation is that the Government have less than a year to run.

My final word is about school placing requests. Something must be done about that issue. Children in the Toryglen part of my constituency have to walk pass Holyrood secondary school to go to a school a mile and a half away—a school that, to put it bluntly, does not have such a good record as Holyrood. For many years, the children of Toryglen who go to St. Brigid's primary school have to go on to a secondary school well outwith the area. That is wrong. I want to put on the record the work of the late Councillor Hugh McKenna, who opposed that policy. I am glad to say that his work is now coming to fruition, and that there is some guarantee of access to Holyrood for the children from St. Brigid's.

I echo what has been said by many, if not all, Opposition Members tonight. I believe in a United Kingdom. However, the Government are wholly unrepresentative of the people of Scotland. They know that, but they do not take account of it. If only they used a little ingenuity and imagination, they could carry the people with them and get their support. I do not say this lightly, but when politicians do not know or do not care about the effects of their policies on the people of Scotland, that is dangerous to democracy and to the United Kingdom. The Government stand indicted on both counts.

8.18 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Earlier today, the Minister and I were in the same Committee Room discussing the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. I said then and I say now that the Government have got it wrong. They do not listen to the people in the areas that their decisions will affect. There is no democracy in the Government.

I have sat here for some time. The debate has been dominated by the domini—the teachers. Almost everyone who has spoken has been a teacher, except my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy). I am not knocking school teachers, but I remember the days when I did knock them. I detested them. When I was a primary school kid I could not wait to get out of school at 4 o'clock. I seemed to get the belt every day. I became respectful of my mother and father. I loved them because I had someone to go home and share my problems with.

In defence of Scottish education, I was proud to serve for many years on one of the finest councils in Britain—Strathclyde regional council. I was never on the education committee, but I was involved in social work and I knew of the invaluable work that teachers and staff were doing to deliver an excellent education service in Strathclyde. I knew, however, that the difficulties that we were facing were caused by this Tory Government's continual harassment and the continual cuts that, year on year, constantly homed in on the education that our young people rightly needed and rightly deserved. Sixteen years on, what is happening?

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Seventeen years.

Mr. Graham: The Minister rightly corrects me; it is 17 years. That is an even worse indictment. Seventeen years on, what has happened to local councils in Scotland? They have been forced into cutting further into education provision. Only this week, I have had representations from local folk who are desperate to see their young kids in nursery provision and the local authority cannot provide it because the Government have cut savagely.

Today's statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland was one of the most horrifying that any Government could have made in the House. It was a reversion to the secondary one and secondary two. It would be a disaster if anything happened to return Scotland to those days. I was born in 1943 and I remember the qualifying examinations. Perhaps the Minister will listen because that is what the Government are driving back to. That is exactly what is going on. That is the road that the Government are trying to take us down.

I know two young men who, if the Government had their way, would have been born to fail. I shall give their ages: one is 25 and the other is 18. From early on, both suffered asthmatic conditions, which killed them in relation to going to school. They could not get to school, they lost half their schooling, they had to receive special education and they had pre-five help. If that raft had not been there, those young kids would have been born to fail.

Those kids went through their whole education like that. During the first years of primary life, they lost half their schooling because of a health problem that seriously held back their education. If the Government had their way, those kids would have been born to fail because of their health.

I am glad that the education system and the courage of school teachers and Strathclyde education officials ensured that those kids were not born to fail and that they received an education. They did not, however, have to qualify in the S1 and the S2. I will go further.

By the way, those schools were state schools. In the league tables that the Government gave them, they came bottom, but one of those young men has a BA Hons. in computing and business. He has suffered badly with his health. He was born to fail under the Government's approach to education, but he now has his BA Hons. and is doing all right. At 18, the other young lad is probably going this year to university, but, under this Government, he would have been born to fail.

The nursery voucher of £1,100 would not give any young person decent nursery provision. In Strathclyde, the estimated cost is £3,000 plus and the Minister is prepared to say that he has given us a good deal. The only person to whom he has given a good deal is the one with plenty of money, who can top the £1,100 and send his kids to nursery school.

The kids that I have talked about were born to fail. Their mothers and fathers would never have the money to ensure that their kids have a good education. The Government deeply want the born-to-fail approach. They are not going to give such young people an education boost.

The £1,100 voucher is nonsense. Why does the Minister not recognise that he has a duty and responsibility not only to parents, but, more important, to children? Give every kid a place. Why give them a £1,100 voucher? Give them a place in a nursery school.

Today, I was delighted to have a cup of tea and a sandwich, so I will declare an interest, with the Scottish Pre-School Play Association. What a tremendous and

[Mr. Graham]

incredible organisation and what do the Government do? They kick it in the teeth. They have denied it the appropriate money to survive. Because of its funding, it has not been able to continue improving and improving.

Minister, you are laughing.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman, not for the first time, as I recall, that he is addressing me and not the Minister?

Mr. Graham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is one of the problems that we have in the House after not speaking for so long. We forget the rules, but I will still try to say what I passionately believe. The Minister has failed education in Scotland. He is failing our young folk and therefore he is not giving them the hope that we want. He is not giving them that aspiration.

What is education for? Can the Minister tell me that? Why do we educate young folk and spend money? Why do we bother? Does the Minister want to send them back to work in the mines when they are five years of age and in the mills on bread and butter? Many of us ask, "What are the Government's education policies about?" I know what my education policies are about. They are to ensure a better life for all of us, and that young folk have a good healthy life, retire in comfort and, I hope, achieve their lifelong ambitions. For all of us, that is not easy. A Government can, however, open the door at the early stage of education. They can ensure that education institutions are correct. They can try, but this Government do not try.

Mrs. Ewing: My hon. Friend is speaking with great passion on education and I endorse much of what he has said. Given that both he and I, although I am slightly younger than him, agree that one of the most fundamental aspects of our education system is that we should have a professional qualified staff, has the Minister said whether there will be additionally trained staff to supply the education under the voucher scheme, which we all think is ridiculous?

Mr. Graham: I am sure that the Minister will attempt to answer that, but, today, we had a profound statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland, which sounded like a bag of wind because there was no substance behind it to deliver what we are rightly demanding: education provisions and resources for our kids to see their education through.

The two young men about whom I spoke are my sons, so I know what I am saying. Both my kids came through state provision. Both were educated in Linwood. Both went to a nursery school, a local primary school and Linwood high school. I am delighted about the state education that our young folk have received and I am overwhelmed at the tremendous generosity of school teachers, who work hard to ensure that not just my two sons, but other kids receive an education.

Many young folk in Linwood have done very well. I remember the devastation that the league table caused to young and older teachers who worked in an area with tremendous unemployment. The Minister is condemning kids to fail because their mothers and fathers have been unemployed since the old Chrysler car factory shut. They are still unemployed after 10 years. Their kids do not have separate rooms and the parents do not have the money to pay for extras for their kids' education—they look to the state to bear the burden because they are living off the state. Many are living on invalidity benefit and are seriously ill but some still have young families.

One of the major problems facing the Tory party in Scotland is its lack of councillors. The Government have undermined local government so much that their own folk no longer want to serve on local government. The Government therefore no longer have the talented old Tories that I remember. By the way, I do not condemn all Tories. Indeed, I remember some very good ones. I remember Len Turpie who was an excellent councillor. He could stand up and argue for quality in education. I remember Guys like old Councillor Farquharson who is dead now. He was a damn good man who also fought to the end. These folk would be turning in their grave if they saw the Government's lack of commitment to education in Scotland. I am not condemning all Tories but I am condemning the Government and the Minister for not standing up for young folk.

I remember when Tory councillors made healthy contributions but I also saw their sadness during the Thatcher years when the Government were for ever making cuts, when their cherished aims and ambitions to see kids in their area educated were failing, when the clubs and youth clubs were shutting and when pre-five education provision was not being supported. They asked me whether there was any way I could get the funding in Eastwood because I looked after part of the Eastwood scene under urban aid. I remember good councillors like old Robbie Robson and others asking me for money for this or that scheme because they needed the resources.

The solution is not just to throw money at the problem. We must ensure proper provision. We need to see a change of heart and direction on the part of the Government. Today was an opportunity for the Government to discuss the way forward with all those concerned in Scotland. Clearly, the Government lack the support and background information that they used to get from the old Tories, the ones who were concerned about and worked in local government. That is all behind them. The Government sit and make judgments in an ivory tower and distrust everyone. It is astounding that there is only one Scottish Tory Member in the Chamber, and that is the Minister.

Mrs. Ewing: And the other one is sleeping.

Mr. Graham: If I shout loud enough, perhaps other Scottish Tories Members will come and listen to my pearls and gems of wisdom. If I shout loud enough, perhaps old Len Turpie will come to their defence and give them his pearls of wisdom. Jenny Browning might appear; perhaps the great Mr. Farquharson or the old Stan Dean will come and bail them out of the terrible hole they are in. However, it is all our kids who are in a hole because of the Government's lack of commitment.

I mentioned the Scottish Pre-School Play Association. Perhaps the Minister could listen to what it has said and consider its funding. That would be a step in the right direction—we could even be on a winner there.

I have to mention school boards. When I was a councillor I attended my school council faithfully—the Minister can check my record. I attended as many

meetings as I could as a regional councillor for nine years. I also attended my community council meetings faithfully for nine years, not out of a sense of responsibility but because I wanted to. I may not have had the greatest of educations. I certainly do not have any degrees—the only degrees I have are the cold ones—but I was an engineer and served my apprenticeship. I worked hard to get my engineering qualification. When I became a councillor, I took an interest in education and my community.

At that time, school councils were well attended. They drew people from a wider area and those people made a genuine commitment and contribution, although perhaps that did not happen everywhere in Scotland. Lo and behold, however, the Minister's grand plan is that every school should have a school board. Parent-teacher associations struggled, went up and down and in and out of the game, but school councils remained a stabilising force. If the PTAs were not too strong, people could at least contribute to the school councils, thus keeping those councils alive.

Since the advent of school boards, it would be useful and interesting to have some facts and figures about attendance, their make-up and composition. I have never seen any statistics giving an indication whether school boards are really working across Scotland. Hon. Members should not get me wrong; I know many members of school boards who attend assiduously and do their best. They tell me, "Tommy, it's a great struggle. There aren't many of us which makes it very difficult." Some hanker for the old school councils. We do not want to turn back the clock but the old system could have been improved instead of the Government's scheme being introduced. The Government thought that they were improving things by providing more devolution but, as the troops were thin on the ground, they felt that they could not improve the system. I hope that school boards are a success, but I believe that there should always be the umbrella of a school council.

I feel that the Government are not listening. They are not getting support from their people on the ground. They do not have many people on the ground—that is what I have been saying all night.

As I have already stressed, many school teachers have been playing their part in highlighting the problems in Scottish education. Many people are dedicated to ensuring good education in Scotland. I see that in some politicians, officials, certainly in the teaching profession and also in people outside the profession. However, I am worried about the Government's totally undemocratic domination of Scottish education over the past 16 years. They say that they will increase democracy but it becomes a closed book. They say that they will listen to people but they then reject everything folk tell them. They have directed education and the curriculum but not to the good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) mentioned the three Rs. I believe that children should be able to do arithmetic and should know the alphabet but, 17 years on, the Government should look at the kids around them. What is happening is mind boggling. Some kids' parents have the wherewithal to provide computers and equipment at home. When my two sons talk to me about the Internet and websites, I have to hang my head in shame. I have not been able to keep up, but nor have the Government kept up with the changes. They have not kept up with the advantages that we could be gaining through the computer network. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has grasped its importance and is pushing ahead. He hopes that the Labour Government will deliver the Internet to every school in the country.

This Government have been in office for 17 years—the Minister himself corrected me and told me that it was 17 years and is very proud of that fact—but how many young folk can now operate computers? I have mentioned kids whose parents have the wherewithal to provide such things, but I have met staff who have asked youngsters whether they can operate a computer. No, they cannot. They never learnt how. I am talking about 17, 18, 19 and 20-year-olds. It is horrifying.

How can we have any faith in the Government or in a voucher scheme that is set at such a low level—£1,100? How can we have any faith in a Government who not only turn the clock back but return us to the dark ages of S1 and S2? I tell the Minister: I wish that hon. Members could turn the clock back to 1979, and that we could have had a continuation of a Labour Government. Perhaps the folk in this country who we look after would then have seen the benefits of high technology—of the highways and byways of the computer world.

The Minister may laugh, but I assure him that the folk in my constituency have suffered too long at the hands of this Government—with raging unemployment, factory after factory closing, job opportunities being missed and squandered, education opportunities being missed, and with young folk who were promised an education or training place being denied them.

Who said, "Every kid who leaves school will be guaranteed an education or training place"? The Prime Minister said it. What happened to that commitment? It went in the bin. That was the Government's education and training offer. We cannot trust anything they say because they will not deliver a healthy, educated young man and woman in Scotland to take on the world.

I remember the days when a Scotsman and a Scotswoman, well educated, could go to any part of the world and be given a job. Those people have contributed to America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. They helped to sail the ships of the nation and to build shipyards and engineering factories from the UK to Russia to America. That is the opportunity that the Government have denied—the opportunity for a good education and a sound, solid and secure future. Those opportunities are driven by a quality education, not by a bum Government.

8.42 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I am, perhaps, old-fashioned—in terms of both major parties—in believing still that education in the modern world is not about drumming a series of rote-learning techniques into kids in what are called the basics of English language and mathematics, but increasingly, or it should be, about learning how to learn, about learning skills that will allow people to learn new things as they go through life. We seem to be turning our backs on that, and I must say that my party is only marginally better than the Conservative party in those matters.

We must now think in those terms, because no one now has a guaranteed job for the rest of their lives. In the past, if people had a certain qualification, they became a bank clerk, for example, and would remain a bank clerk,

[Mr. John Maxton]

although they might move up in the bank. That is no longer true. People can now start working in a bank and be made redundant four or five years later because the skills learnt in those first four or five years have been taken over by a computer or a machine. What we need from our education system is adaptability, learning skills and the ability to change and to adapt as we go through life. I fear that we are turning our backs on that.

I apologise to the House, because I heard only the two Front-Bench speeches as I had to go to chair a Standing Committee. I am astonished that, in those speeches on education in Scotland in the modern world, when an information revolution is taking place that will transform not only our television sets and computers and what we do in business—it should also be transforming our education system—the word "computer" never crossed anyone's lips until my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) spoke.

Computers were not mentioned, yet computers, the skills that children will learn and the amount of information they will have at their fingertips will be part and parcel of education throughout the world. If it does not happen here and we do not put computers on our kids' desks, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has promised, we will be overtaken in the coming technological revolution by every country from east to west. That is already starting to happen.

I want to deal with the Secretary of State's comments, starting with the tests that he claims to be introducing in the first and second years of secondary education. I must say, first, that, in relation to the set of statistics that he used on percentages in tests, I have never heard anything so phoney in my life. He is essentially implying that no child in Tayside has been tested on their mathematics, language or writing skills. What nonsense. What he means is that they were not set a test, sat down and told, "Here is the test that you must do." Every teacher constantly carries out a series of tests to understand what are each child's abilities. If there is a problem, it is too often because class sizes are too large to permit teachers always to cope with every child, but they all assess their children all the time.

One of the problems with tests is that teachers become entirely reliant on them and say, "We are working to it, and we will finish with it. That will be my judgment, and the parents', the school's and the state's judgment of the child's ability at that point." That does not judge how the child will do.

A very bright child might pass the examination comfortably because that is the easiest thing in the world for him, but in fact he might be struggling at school, and for many different reasons. He may have a drug problem, an emotional problem or problems at home, and he might not have done as well in the test as he could. The test does not show that. The test shows only the fact that he managed to pass it and that he has the right number of marks to put him way up the scale. That result goes back to his parents, and they say, "He is doing quite well, isn't he?" But at the meeting with the parents, the teacher says, "Your child is very bright, but he is not doing as well as he ought to be."

Conversely, the poorest child, who works very hard, struggles and does not get the top marks—perhaps he manages only just to get through the test—puts in much more effort to pass the test than does a brighter child.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am grateful to hear of the hon. Gentleman's experience from his days of teaching, and I accept everything that he has just said, but is he saying that national testing and parents' evenings and teachers adding to what they know about the child are mutually exclusive?

Mr. Maxton: I accept what the Minister said. They should not be mutually exclusive, but there is always a danger with tests that the teacher will work to the test. They work towards the test, train the child to the test, and the test ultimately becomes the only thing that matters. Because it is a national test, parents will pay much greater regard to the results of it than they do to the teacher's comments at a parents' meeting. Much time and effort will go into the tests; teachers might be less able to hold parents' meetings. That is a danger. In a good and well-organised school, that will not happen, but the danger exists.

I should like to deal with why the Secretary of State said he wanted tests and why we have these new national tests. The only real reason he gave was that it is a way of identifying children who are struggling and have difficulties. I tell him from experience that identifying the child who is struggling and having difficulties is no great problem, because it always happens. Often, it will happen before the child even gets to school. The parents will be aware that the child is not developing as fast as he ought to, or perhaps the problem will be picked up by a social worker or a psychologist. Certainly the problem will be picked up in primary 1 or primary 2. Somebody will know that the child is not doing as well as he or she ought.

Identification is not the problem. What matters is what we do about it, and whether we ensure that there are resources such as special needs teachers to give the child special care and attention outwith the rest of the class, although the child none the less remains part of the class. When dealing with such children, there is a double role. We must ensure not only that they keep up as well as they can, but that they remain part of their peer group. They must not be divorced from it.

Often, what is required is extra help within the classroom. Of course some children must be educated separately, and they are easy to identify. We are worried not about those children but about the children who remain in the mainstream of education but have difficulty there. They must be given special help.

It is absurd for the Government to announce tests to identify children with special needs while they are cutting local government resources so that enough extra teachers cannot be employed. Sometimes, the extra staff may not be teachers; they may be supervisors, or even parents. I do not care which they are. Parents go in to school to help with listening to reading, for example. When schools and education authorities have to cut resources, it is nonsense to say that we need tests to identify people with difficulties. It does not work.

I have seen what happens, and I know the problems that can arise from lack of resources, rather than from lack of identification. The Minister and the Secretary of State

have got it wrong if they believe that identification is the problem. We need to spend more money, not less, on resources for such children.

The same is true at nursery school level, which is where the voucher system is wrong. The Government did their testing and trials in East Renfrewshire. As that is a new local authority area, I presume that the tests were done in the old district of Eastwood. Those of us who know that district know that it is a wealthy middle-class area where parents would be delighted to receive £1,100 to spend on sending their children to the nursery schools that will already exist there.

The money is a top-up. It does not pay all the costs, but the parents in Eastwood can afford to pay for nursery education. If they did not get the £1,100, they would probably pay the whole cost anyway. They would not care, because they have the money. It is absurd to say that a trial held in East Renfrewshire shows that the scheme works.

It is not the children of middle-class parents, such as all of us here, who demand and need nursery education. Yes, those children should have it. It should be available for them, and I want them to have it. I wanted my children to have nursery education and I want other children to have it too. But it is not they who absolutely need it, as children from poor and deprived areas need it.

As an educationist I was brought up with the phrase that my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde has used frequently tonight—"Born to Fail". That was the title of a seminal work in education that showed that children from deprived backgrounds would always have more difficulty coping when they started primary school because they did not have basic language skills.

People may say that that is nonsense, but the standard book with which kids started in primary 1 in those days—I agree that things are not quite the same now—would be one of the "Janet and John" series. The language and concepts in that series of reading books were middle class, and they were often beyond the experience of some of the kids who tried to read them. The idea of going out into the countryside for a picnic with mummy and daddy in the car was difficult for many kids to understand.

As Peter Townsend pointed out in "Born to Fail", by the time many kids started in primary school, they were already well behind their peers who came from a different background. It is those kids who needed, and still need, the nursery school to give them the start they often do not get in their own homes and surroundings. Nursery education is good for all kids, but for kids from those areas it is essential, not only at four but from three to four, so that they can start primary school on level terms with other kids. If the Minister does not understand that, he is simply playing with the idea. The £1,100 will not cover the cost of nursery education for such kids, and it is unreal to imagine that it will.

The Secretary of State made great play of the standard of nursery education, and of what would be provided. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) jumped up, as ever, to say that his constituents were delighted to have £1,100 to spend on nursery education but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) pointed out, in some areas there will not necessarily be any nursery schools for parents to choose.

Once parents have been handed the vouchers and have the £1,100, they will demand nursery schools, so people will set them up. That is the market working, but the standard of accommodation, and the level of training and teaching, will not be those which, rightly, the Secretary of State and the Minister would like.

What will happen? Either no nursery schools will be set up in the poor areas, so people will have a useless piece of paper in their hands which is theoretically worth £1,100 but does not mean anything, or the standards in those areas will drop. A blind eye will be turned so long as there is at least something for kids in rural and other areas. Something may be there, but standards will have dropped.

The Minister may reply that that is what the two extra education inspectors are for. I do not know what the inspection cycle for primary and secondary schools is, but my kids went through the state system for a period which, between when the first started and the third finished, lasted close on 20 years. In those 20 years, the primary school that my kids went to has been inspected once, and so has the secondary school.

So far as I can see, the cycle of inspections of schools lasts about 10 years. Every 10 years or so—

Mr. Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Maxton: If the Minister wants to contradict me, I shall be happy to be contradicted on that point.

Mr. Robertson: I realise that the hon. Gentleman was chairing a Standing Committee when I explained the cycle of inspection of nursery providers. Every provider in the pilot areas will be inspected in the pilot year. When we go national, providers will be inspected as soon as possible, and certainly within 24 months.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Then what?

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend is quite right—then what? What will be the cycle after that to ensure that standards are maintained? What will happen when, for example, two trained nursery teachers start up and run a school, and one—assuming that she is female—becomes pregnant and leaves and they cannot find anybody else so a parent is appointed to stand in? The school will have received its initial inspection, and the next one may not be for God knows how long. It may be 10 years before the school is inspected again. It is fine to say that there will be an initial inspection within 24 months, but that is only part of the story. What happens thereafter?

How many nursery schools are the Government expecting the two inspectors to cover? Presumably, the figure is in the hundreds. If they are to do their job properly, those two inspectors will inspect perhaps one or two schools a week, if that. We are talking about only 40 weeks of the year, because inspections will be conducted in term time, so it will be years before each school is inspected again to ensure that standards are being maintained.

Will schools report to the Scottish Office about staff changes so that, when staff have to be replaced or simply change jobs—which they do—it is possible to ensure that their replacements have the right qualifications?

[Mr. Maxton]

Will there be any system to ensure such practice, or are we simply to accept that some schools had trained teachers to start with but will no longer have them?

The voucher scheme is a mess—the Government do not know how to run it. They do not have an education policy. The Secretary of State's speech was more about attacking the Labour party than about proposing his own education policy. We need proper nursery education for all our children. It is best provided by local authorities. For a start, they have the resources. Schools are increasingly not full, have been closed or are about to close. Facilities are available for other purposes. In many areas, private schools offering poor accommodation will be set up and good schools will be closed and pulled down, and resources will be wasted.

As the Secretary of State tried to claim, every child has a right to nursery education. It will not be provided and it will not work under a voucher scheme. The Bill is a mess and I am glad that the Opposition will be voting for the reasoned amendment.

9.1 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). I cannot bring his considerable expertise and knowledge to the subject, but I hope that, as someone who has gone through the system and is also a parent with young children, I can contribute.

We have not yet appreciated the fact that the Bill is an example of the Government's failure in many areas of education policy. Part of the Bill corrects the placement requests as a result of the failure of previous legislation. Another part deals with school boards as a result of the failure of what was implemented before. The introduction of nursery vouchers is the result of a failure over 17 years to provide nursery education for all who want it. I therefore consider the Bill to be to a certain extent a failure.

We all make mistakes, but the failures that I have described were all pointed out when the Government introduced the legislation. They were told that there would be problems with placement requests and school boards. I served on the Committee that considered the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 and I remember that we sat night in, night out—we had an all-night sitting—and day in, day out to get the Bill on to the statute book. Nobody wanted it, but it went through.

The Minister used to keep asking us how many schools we thought would opt out. We used to say a handful. My goodness, we were wrong. Not even a handful of schools has opted out. The Minister used to say that school boards would be successful. We said that there might be some trouble finding members for them. My goodness, we did not realise how right we were. People are being co-opted on to them. As hon. Members know from the schools in their constituencies, when the time to appoint members of school boards comes around, headmasters try to force people to stand. We certainly got it right then and the Bill is another example of the failure of the Government's education policy.

I want to talk about something that is not in the Bill—the Secretary of State's announcement about testing. I probably have as much experience as anyone of sitting tests. I sat the "qualy" and the 11-plus. I sat the ordinary as the lowers had just finished and I sat the highers. I went to university for seven years and I sat at least 10 examinations every year for seven years, sometimes five or six a week. When I left, I sat a primary examination and then a final fellowship, so I have some experience of what is involved in testing and I want to make a number of points about it.

My strongest point relates to the absolute divisions and failures involved in all examinations. There cannot be an examination without people failing it and that has a devastating effect on them and their families. Others have spoken about the 11-plus and I want to recount my experience as there are fewer of us around who have sat the 11-plus. I remember to this day when the examination results were announced and suddenly our class was split down the middle. Half went off to the high school and the other half were consigned to failure. Children were weeping in the classroom as we were separated off. Our society was divided as half my school friends were considered to be failures.

We had the same experience when my younger brother failed his 11-plus. I remember it to this day. It was like a death in the family and it has been experienced by people everywhere. I should also say that it was a pretty useless test because my brother who failed the 11-plus is now a professor of aeronautical engineering.

Not only are examinations of limited value, but the social division and the devastation that they produce are overwhelming. We should consider what we are doing to children. The purpose of education is not to fail people, but to prepare them to grasp further information later in life so that they can develop their full potential. When we introduce testing, we are introducing the possibility of failure.

I do not understand the point of testing. Of course one can make people pass their examinations and schools can do very well. My school did quite well in the "qualy". For an entire year all we did was prepare ourselves for the examination. We sat examination paper after examination paper, year in, year out. As a result, when I went to high school, having come from the school with the best test results, I was deficient in geography and history—aspects of education that I have never recovered to this day, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) reminds me every time we talk about history.

Mrs. Fyfe: Not to mention music and art.

Mr. Galbraith: I play the violin very badly and I am not very good at the mouth organ either.

I hope that the Minister understands my point about the downside of testing. Teachers teach for the tests and pupils take them and at the end of the day they may produce someone who has some knowledge and does well in tests, but I have yet to see the proof that such people are better educated.

I remain bitterly opposed to tests at S1 and S2. I cannot see the point of further examinations and further opportunities for failure. Children have enough problems when they have to sit examinations. At university, we sat exams year after year. I remember the stress, the strain and the failures. Let us not burden our children with that. They have enough to do growing up. Let us not have that

and let us not have the precursor of a qualifying examination such as the old 11-plus that the Government may be considering.

Let me move on to other aspects of failure. I shall deal briefly with the provision relating to placing requests. We all know that it has resulted from the Secretary of State's problems in Balfron. The same problems occur in my constituency, where every school is full and receives numerous placing requests. I receive numerous complaints about it because the schools are bursting at the seams.

One thing that particularly annoys parents who move next to a school in April or May is that they cannot get their child into that school. The child is then put on a bus and driven past the school to another school two or three miles away. What sort of preposterous education policy allows that to happen? The Government have been told about that, as I have written to Ministers about the matter on several occasions. They always replied that there were no problems and that the policy was wonderful—the usual jargon. But there is a problem, and I am glad that—at long last—the Government have recognised that placing requests present problems and are beginning to address them. Every school in my constituency has placing requests. They are excellent schools, and it is a continuing problem for them.

I wish to refer to school boards. We spent night after night in debates on the legislation on school boards, and there was no great enthusiasm for them. We all knew that the boards were being set up to allow schools to opt out, and had no inherent function. We predicted at the time that there would be problems filling the boards. In my area, which is highly middle-class, one would think that there would be huge competition for places on boards. But we must still co-opt individuals on to them. The boards are supposed to provide democracy, but it is nothing of the sort if one is being co-opted or forced by the head teacher on to a board because nobody else will do it. That is the reality, even in the schools in my area. That is another failure on the part of the Government.

I wish to deal with nursery provision. My hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart was incorrect when he suggested that nursery education is of benefit only to children from lower-class backgrounds, as it is extremely beneficial to all children. It is not just a case of their knowledge increasing, but it is also beneficial to young children who may be less well integrated.

Mr. Maxton: I did not want to give that impression, and I apologise if I did. The fact is that the need for nursery education of children from poor backgrounds is that much greater if they are to cope with primary school.

Mr. Galbraith: I apologise to my hon. Friend, and I understand the point that he was trying to make. The need for nursery education among poorer children is greater. Although it is much less important for middle-class children to attend nursery school, they should do so as they benefit greatly from it—for example, they can develop their social integration. Nursery education is very important and my understanding—I have not read all the literature on the subject—is that children who go through nursery education and pre-school playgroups do extremely well in primary school. We must ensure that all children have access to nursery education.

The problem with the Government's nursery vouchers method is that it is unnecessarily bureaucratic. There are many areas where nursery provision is first class, but the Government are providing a bureaucratic system that will be difficult to work, will not increase the provision and will give hand-outs to those who have already used the private sector. I do not see why people should have to pay, as we have a nursery education system at the moment. There is no need to make it any more complicated.

Finally, I shall refer to the Scottish Qualifications Authority and its representation. I have read the part of the Bill that deals with the matter and, although I understand the need for the complexity of the representation, we could have simplified the method. Is there an absolute necessity to balance the numbers? It is the first time that I have seen such an arrangement, and I wonder whether it is necessary.

More importantly, what will be the composition of the authority? The people whom we choose to serve on it will be selected according to what we decide education is for. That is a debate that we have yet to have. Occasionally it surfaces, but we have never quite reached a decision. Once we have decided what education is all about, we can decide who should serve on the authority.

The Government seem to think of education as a way of taking a child from his early years on into a screwdriver job in a factory—probably a factory brought in by Locate in Scotland. I fear that the new authority will be stuffed with "industrialists". Industrialists have an important role to play, but the idea that they have a special insight into education and its purpose is false. Indeed, I would say that they are not necessarily the best people to decide what education is all about. They have a very narrow view of what society requires. The education of some of the industrialists whom I have met leaves something to be desired.

I do not want the authority to be packed with local industrialists who want to produce automatons that will fit into their system, churning out people who will take up the screwdriver jobs to which I have referred. There is more to education than that.

Education is about developing people's potential and enabling them to use the skills that they have been taught, so that they can make use of their knowledge throughout their lives. Of course people need the basic building blocks; I am not a great one for claiming that they can find out everything for themselves. People need to be able to read and count, but once they have these building blocks they need also to know how to use them. Our education system fails to teach that, even though Plowden tried to square up to the problem.

Throwing facts and figures at people only gets them so far, in life and in education. There comes a time when people can no longer learn by rote: they have to understand. In science and mathematics there comes a time when learning by rote is of no value whatever—in dynamics, sliding planes and forces of velocity, for instance. Students need to understand the principles behind them so as to be able to progress.

In his day Plowden attempted to face these facts, but that achievement will be lost if the new body is to be made up, once again, of the sort of industrialists on whom this Government are so keen. All that they will want to do is to generate wealth.

[Mr. Galbraith]

I hope for a debate on the nature and purpose of education, and I hope that a liberal view will emerge at the end of it. Education is about realising potential and using it. That is the only way to a full life. It is of course necessary to have some wealth to make these choices, but people need first to have the knowledge with which to make informed choices. That is what is lost when people are trained, not educated.

The Bill does nothing about any of those problems. It is essentially a mark of the Government's failure in education policy. It acknowledges the failures of school boards and placement requests; above all it acknowledges, after 17 years, the Government's failure to provide nursery education and to start youngsters off down the most important avenue of their lives. I am therefore delighted with the Opposition's reasoned amendment, and I urge the House to support it.

9.19 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) in these debates. He has given a considerable amount of thought to the Bill and much of what he says is from the point of view of one who, perhaps more than any other hon. Member, has benefited from the Scottish education system. Through his children, he continues to respect and admire the Scottish education system.

Hon. Members may be surprised to realise that this evening we are discussing a major plank of the Scottish Office's legislative programme for this year. In the closing weeks of the Session we are discussing a major piece of legislation—it is being rushed through. Nothing is more important in forming Scotland's future than the nature of our education system. The Labour party accepts some provisions of the Bill and we shall debate them constructively in Committee. Other aspects of the Bill strike at the heart of the Scottish education system and at the principles that have underpinned it for centuries.

Tonight the Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—in perhaps the worst speech of his career—talked about his secret agenda. He discussed what should happen to Scottish education under his leadership at the Scottish Office. Without warning through the usual channels, we have learned that the Government will introduce new proposals for compulsory testing at S1 and S2. The fact that we are getting this information so late in the day is a measure of the Government's lack of respect for the House and the nature of the debate. These are major issues and we should have had the opportunity to discuss them. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), has said that this is the Second Reading. He seems to have forgotten that there has been full discussion in another place and a Special Standing Committee in another place. A controversial aspect has suddenly been added to the Bill. I shall refer to testing at a later point.

Much in the Bill could have achieved consensus. In fact, I have no hesitation in saying that we shall be constructive about many aspects of it. I refer to the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Arising from the work of Professor Howie and the structure of highers in Scotland, we need to review post-16 education and the nature of the qualifications. When the Secretary of State introduced the provisions of the Bill relating to the Scottish Qualifications Authority he did not refer to the "Higher Still" project that is going on at the same time. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss many of these critical issues relating to the "Higher Still" project in Committee.

We are anxious about some issues, including the representation on the Scottish Qualifications Authority—an issue that has been raised by a number of hon. Members today. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) talked about the prospect of another quango staffed from the bunker of the Secretary of State for Scotland. I have a theory that the Secretary of State for Scotland runs the Government of Scotland from the executive departure lounge at Edinburgh airport as there is a surprising recurrence of the names of those who frequent that lounge among those who appear in quangos. However, that is not why I am concerned about the membership of the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Broad-based expertise must be made available to the authority. We have seen through the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council how that expertise can be—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland seems to think that I am going on about quangos. I am not—I am trying to make a substantive point about the nature of representation on the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Broad-based expertise must be made available to the authority. The Minister said by way of intervention that there will be extensive consultation. Every time Ministers refer to "consultation", I hold my breath. They consulted about the introduction of nursery vouchers and when they did not like what the consultation revealed—almost unanimous opposition to the nursery voucher scheme—they changed the rules of the consultation process. I worry when the Secretary of State says that he will do anything by consultation.

We wish to explore another anxiety more fully in Committee. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) referred to the status of vocational qualifications within the examination board. We must ensure that the vocational element of the Scottish Qualifications Authority is not downgraded. I was a little concerned by the remarks of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who suggested—unwittingly, I hope—that the vocational element was a lesser aspect of the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

A number of hon. Members—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton)—laid great stress on the need to ensure that Scotland has a valid skills base for the future. We can ensure that by enhancing vocational qualifications. All party leaders in Scotland have signed a joint declaration in relation to enterprise education and manufacturing industry—aspects which are critical to Scotland's industrial future. In examining the nature of post-16 qualifications in our schools, it is important to take into account those vocational qualifications.

I take on board—as I hope that the House will—the significant point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland about the confusion that industrialists sometimes experience. A plethora of qualifications are

available. It is a minefield. I have been a personnel director and I know how confusing it is to be confronted with qualifications alien to one's own, which may be rather dated. Several hon. Members have referred to that problem.

We wish to debate other aspects of the Bill more fully in Committee, not least the subject of school boards. Several hon. Members referred in detail to the workings of school boards in their constituencies. Everyone will accept that some school boards operate magnificently and some are an absolute disaster, comprising Philadelphia lawyers who see the opportunity to exercise a little power in another domain. We wish to build on the positive aspects of school boards. The Labour party proposes to extend the concept to school commissions. We will take into account the views not just of those who wish to serve on school boards but of those who currently make a marvellous contribution to school life through parent-teacher associations and those who operate in the wider community. A school is about more than the education of its pupils. I hope that we shall be able to discuss that issue in more detail in Committee.

When we came to the House this afternoon, we assumed that the meat of the Bill would be the nursery voucher proposal, but then we were suddenly confronted with the issue of compulsory testing. My hon. Friends may regard it as heretical, but I enjoy listening to the Secretary of State for Scotland as he employs a little showmanship in his delivery. However, he made a critical error in deciding to upstage the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South, and to take over his brief by opening the debate. It was glaringly obvious that the Secretary of State had not thought through some of his proposals, such as compulsory—voluntary, perhaps statutory—testing, and we witnessed a unique spectacle this evening when the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South rose to rescue his boss from the deep hole that he had dug for himself. We are left asking some serious questions about exactly what the Government are up to.

It is obvious from tonight's debate that hon. Members are fast coming to the conclusion that we are going back to the days of the 11-plus when children could be destroyed by the results of tests of their unformed intellectual ability when they had just made the critical transition from primary school to secondary school. My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) mentioned the fact that many of those who have spoken today were teachers. I am not a teacher: I am a much more dangerous beast than that—I am a parent, and parents know the trauma that children go through, especially at this time of year, when they have to make the critical change from primary school to secondary school. Every educationist can confirm that the transition from primary to secondary has a significant effect on the performance of young people. Instead of bludgeoning us with outdated diatribes and ideologies, the Government should make a contribution to analysing how best we can advance the performance of children in S1 and S2. The Government should not put another pressure on those children.

The Secretary of State talked about the right of parents to choose. He got himself into an almighty fankle about whether parents could choose whether their children were tested, but he gave the game away when he said that the test would be a qualification. All the Under-Secretary's dancing about will not draw attention away from the fact that the Secretary of State said that the test will be a qualification. We are left with the inevitable conclusion that children must pass the S1 test to move on to S2. Even if the Under-Secretary backs down on that, we have seen tonight that selection will return to Scottish schools over the heads of Her Majesty's inspectorate, parents and educationists.

We have seen a doctrinaire approach to education in Scotland today from a Secretary of State who should have learned his lesson the last time he was hounded out of Scotland for introducing tests that parents opposed. The Secretary of State talked about doctrinaire egalitarianism. I believe in egalitarianism. The Scottish education system, from John Knox onwards, has believed in egalitarianism. I believe in equality of opportunity for every child. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I may be part of the monstrous regiment. In the Scottish education system, we believe in equality of opportunity. We are all Jock Tamson's bairns. Regardless of the assisted places scheme and the attempts by the Government to anglicise the Scottish education system, to a man and woman in Scotland we are committed to equality of opportunity. We are committed to ensuring that the marketplace should not return to education.

I am not surprised by the doctrinaire approach of the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I am worried. In the document that he published in the 1980s, "Save Our Schools", he made it plain that he favours vouchers not only for nursery education, but for primary and secondary education. I am not the only hon. Member who noticed that when the Secretary of State was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton today to state categorically that there will be no introduction of vouchers for primary and secondary education, he ducked the issue with a smirk on his face. The Opposition will not tolerate the introduction of vouchers for primary and secondary education.

The danger of the voucher system for the provision of nursery education is that it will make children, at their most vulnerable point, a political football in the run-up to a general election. There is no way in which nursery vouchers can be implemented in Scotland before a general election if we keep to the timetable that the Government claim to have set up. In other words, they are running hell for leather so that they can say in their manifesto that they have done something about the provision of early-years education. We have already heard the Secretary of State say that Scottish parents have been brainwashed. He must also think that their heads button up the back. Parents recognise that a voucher for £1,100 does not ensure a place in a nursery school.

In Scotland, we have benefited from a co-operative approach that takes into account the public, private and voluntary sectors. In another part of the House this evening, those who represent the voluntary sector have told hon. Members about the extent to which they have been misled. They are anxious to ensure the best possible start for children in their early years, but the voluntary sector has been put in an awkward position because it cannot provide the quality of education opportunity on which the Government are trying to pass the buck. When we debated the matter in the Scottish Grand Committee in Stirling, the Secretary of State said that we could have nursery schools in church halls. There speaks a man who I doubt has ever been inside a nursery school or to a play group. One must take into account the key factor that little

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

children need special safety facilities. They must be able to turn on a tap that will not scald them and be heated by radiators that will not damage them. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) drew attention to the need for outdoor play areas, which are an important part of a child's development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maryhill also made an important point, which was taken up by other hon. Members, about special needs. Nothing is more important in the early years than identifying the need for special education. The Minister has consistently ducked the issue. He tried to get off the hook by saying that local authorities do not feel that they can handle special needs during the pilot period. Special needs is bigger than a doctrinaire pilot being administered by a Government in the closing days of their life.

There is considerable anxiety about nursery vouchers among members of the Scottish Independent Nurseries Association. The association is concerned about quality assurance and is establishing its own scheme to ensure the highest possible standards. Even if Ministers are not prepared to accept this, SINA knows that the scheme offers great scope for fraud and numerous opportunities for cowboy operators. How do the Government imagine that the 60,000 extra places will be filled, other than with people who are unskilled, untrained and not properly assessed to provide nursery education? I ask the Minister to heed the words of Mrs. Fotheringham of SINA:

"The voucher system will not particularly help private providers to step up new investment or new accommodation. It does not provide extra income to do something different or provide extra premises. There are still not enough places."

The whole issue hinges on there not being enough places.

The Government have been extremely lax in not giving answers about the cost of administration and its nature. The House is asked to believe that the administration cost per nursery voucher will be £22, when 10 different stages will be involved. I think that somebody has run away with the abacus as the scheme will clearly cost considerably more. Where did Capita Management Services, which is to provide the services, come from? The structure already exists within local authorities to administer the scheme. The authorities who expressed to the Scottish Office their interest in the pilot but then withdrew did so because they discovered that the nuts and bolts of the legislation had not been thought through.

The Secretary of State failed to answer the point that I raised earlier, relating to the nursery run by Mrs. Valerie White in Shawlands—which reflects that the Government did not think through what will happen to nursery providers on the boundaries of pilot areas. How come a number of nursery vouchers were delivered to the wrong postcode area? If that is a measure of the efficiency that we can expect from Capita, my hopes are not particularly high.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) made an interesting speech and spoke impressively about the need to encourage young people to respect the environment and to become knowledgable about it. Perhaps he should have a discussion with the Secretary of State as one area badly affected by the cuts forced on local authorities by the Government is the environmental part of the curriculum for five to 14-year-olds.

Both the right hon. Member for Dumfries and the hon. Member for Ayr talked about schools being part of the community. The hon. Member for Ayr talked about schools being used outside school hours to benefit the community. In Edinburgh, Glasgow and my constituency, until the Government cut education funding, schools were used for that purpose. We are seeing from the Government a narrow, doctrinaire approach which fails to take into account the fact that we are talking about children. Those who are concerned about children are appalled at the missed opportunities in the Bill, which is a blatant attempt to paper over cracks. The problems that will be created by nursery vouchers will haunt the Government for the rest of their days and will certainly not be tolerated by an incoming Labour Government.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): We have had a wide-ranging and useful debate, and I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part. I shall try, if allowed, to respond to as many points as possible.

We have discussed many areas of education policy where the Government have brought about, and are bringing about, real choice and lasting improvements. That has been in the face, as we have heard throughout the debate, of doubt, protest and resistance from the shower opposite.

Let us take placing requests as one example; since their introduction in 1982, which they opposed, more than 280,000 placing requests have been made throughout Scotland, 90 per cent. of which have been a success story—a success which the opposition opposed at the time.

Mr. George Robertson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister of the Crown to use such language as "the shower opposite"? Can that possibly be within even an expanded definition of being in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): My observation is that the term is generic, but preferably, the Minister should not use it.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My, Opposition Members are touchy about their educational record. They really are touchy about what they have proposed in the past. I am sure that we will have ample opportunity to examine all the points in detail in Committee.

To help Opposition Members with their factual understanding, if nothing more, notes on clauses are available in the Library. I hope that hon. Members will take the opportunity to study them, as they clarify the purpose of the drafting, and I am confident that, for those who have the interests of Scottish education at heart, they will underline the value of the proposals.

The substance of our debate has been on vouchers and testing. We have, of course, already heard most of the Opposition's points on vouchers, both in the press and in the debate in another place. The Government answered them then. My right hon. Friend answered them at the beginning of the debate, but I am happy to answer them again now.

The education of our young children is a matter of immense importance. It inspires strong views, but much of what we have heard today sheds more heat than light. We are still unclear about the policy of the Labour party, because we have heard three answers to the same question. When asked: "What will happen to the voucher scheme?" the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who leads the party, says, "I am not abolishing it." The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) says that the Labour party is abolishing it, and the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) says that it will all be left to a Scottish Parliament. Never during today's debate have we been told what the Labour party proposes. To one question there are three answers.

Opposition Members say that they want parents to have choice, but they want to organise education in such a way as to reduce—even eliminate—choice. They say that they want to see further investment in pre-school education, but are unable to say how much, or how they would finance it. They claim to be interested in quality, but have nothing to compare with our robust proposals for quality assurance. None of that will be lost on parents.

We intend to stimulate growth in pre-school education in a way that sustains quality, broadens choice and supports a mixed-economy provision, with the public, private and voluntary sectors all playing a part.

Mr. Dalyell: Before we leave the subject of finance, the Secretary of State said earlier that in the winding-up speech there would be an answer to the question about the cost of examining S1 and S2 from outside the school. I wonder whether the figures are available.

Mr. Robertson: My right hon. Friend said nothing of the sort. He said that we would go out to consult on it, and that he would be more than happy if the hon. Gentleman wished to participate in the consultation.

We are offering local authorities an opportunity to help to shape the pilot phase of the initiative, and we are consulting at every turn with the entire educational community. We intend that there should be choice for parents, because that is the best means of developing a responsive service. We will deliver quality education for children, because that is what they deserve.

Mr. Welsh: Has the Minister consulted education authorities and personnel on the introduction of testing? When will S1 and S2 tests be introduced? When will the curriculum changes and the accompanying textbooks and other things be introduced? The system cannot cope with the present changes, let alone this new one. What consultation has there been, and what additional resources will there be to allow the professionals to cope with what the Government are imposing on them?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. We have said that we will fund it. We have said that we are taking the necessary powers in the Bill, while at the same time going out to consultation on the detail. The hon. Gentleman is asking us to pre-empt the entire consultation process. That is madness.

The voucher initiative does not require new powers. It can be implemented using existing powers under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Part II of the Bill introduces the more precisely tailored powers of grant, with associated provisions extending the statutory power of inspection and offering opportunities for administrative streamlining in due course.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) asked whether we could convert from kilometres to miles the walking distances for schools. They are two miles and three miles. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able to work that out by dividing the kilometres by eight and then multiplying by five. He tells me that he could do so because he was tested at Arbroath high. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries also asked whether we would consider bringing in a rural affairs element in the five-to-14 curriculum. I know that his education authority is currently working on that, and we would be delighted to give it any help that it wants.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) asked whether the existence of vouchers for pre-school education would interfere with the ability of families on family credit to utilise the child care disregard. That issue was raised in the Select Committee's evidence gathering in Glasgow. We are still giving it some thought. We are confident that, because the voucher value can in no way be treated as parental income, the ability of families to utilise the child care disregard will not be affected. However, I shall write to the hon. Lady shortly setting out the position in full, if she feels that that would be of assistance.

The hon. Lady, together with the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), spoke passionately and genuinely about pupils with special educational needs, and asked whether they would be disadvantaged. Obviously, the answer is no. We are committed to proper and full provision for children with special educational needs. Local authorities are responsible for provision—

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I am responding to the hon. Gentleman's earlier point.

Local authorities are responsible for provision for recording children from the age of two, and there are adequate existing powers in relation to others. All those powers will be retained for children in the pre-school sector. On the whole, the local authorities involved in the pilot schemes saw no particular issues relating to SEN children. However, we shall examine the position during the pilot scheme and its evaluation. I must make it clear that local authorities will retain the funds they currently spend on special educational needs.

The hon. Member for Maryhill was right to say that pre-school education is vital in spotting special needs. She should be supporting the voucher initiative, because through it more children than ever before will receive pre-school education, so their needs will be identified and assessed, where otherwise they might not have been.

Several hon. Members raised the whole question of the evaluation of the pilot. As I explained earlier, my Department has appointed a highly respected team from Stirling university to carry out a further operational review of the pilot.

That review's remit is wide. It will look at the experience of parents and providers. It will examine the way in which the vouchers are used and their effects. It

[Mr. Robertson]

will look at the patterns of provision that emerge and the growth in places that is achieved. The review will link in with local arrangements for monitoring throughout the pilot year.

I shall also appoint a broadly based committee to advise the appointed researchers. It will include COSLA, the Scottish Pre-School Play Association, the Scottish Independent Nurseries Association and all other relevant organisations, as well as distinguished independent academics. We are serious about learning from the pilot and about tackling any problems as we go along. We are demonstrating that in what we do.

The hon. Member for Maryhill also raised the issue of insisting on teaching qualifications in the providing centres. Again, during the pilot, we shall consider staff training, the possible need to develop new and additional forms of training, and the skills needed to deliver the curriculum for pre-fives.

Mrs. Fyfe: As the Minister admits that the Government have not begun even to think about that yet, would it not have been better to delay the Bill's implementation until they did have answers to that serious point?

Mr. Robertson: I am surprised at the hon. Lady saying that, because she used to be a great fan and advocate of what was going on in former Strathclyde region, and community nurseries' experience there and recent research conducted in that context point clearly to keeping an open mind on educational qualifications. She cannot shout Strathclyde region from the rooftops when it suits her and ignore its advice and experience when it does not.

In a thoughtful speech, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) asked about the frequency of inspections of local authority nursery schools and classes. Local authority nursery schools and classes will be inspected in accordance with sampling arrangements that Her Majesty's inspectors use for schools across the board. All Her Majesty's inspectors, not just the extra ones that we have recruited specifically for nurseries, will be competent, and will be used to inspect local authority nursery schools and classes. All new nursery schools and classes will have to complete a profile of education provision as soon as staff are appointed. Her Majesty's inspectors will consider those in setting their inspection priorities and in assessing the need for reinspection.

Mr. Maxton: In my experience, many of the inspectors are ex-secondary school teachers or ex-college of education lecturers. Few of them will have had any experience of nursery education. I am not sure that they are the right people to make true judgments about the quality of nursery education.

Mr. Robertson: That is a terrible slur on the professionalism of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools. Many of them did not come from the rarefied atmosphere of one of Scotland's finest independent schools, but were brought up, like myself, on the hard side of life in the state sector.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) asked about the core grant for the Scottish Pre-School Play Association. I join him in paying tribute to playgroups' excellent work throughout Scotland. Playgroups will be a major player in the pre-school initiative, which will be a valuable source of places, especially in rural areas where the provider market is not yet fully developed.

We are seeking to deal with the issue the hon. Gentleman raised by putting resources towards funding development officers in support of the initiative. Their primary role will be to support providers in the voluntary and private sectors to achieve the standards necessary for a successful participation in the pre-five initiative. The development officers will be attached to Her Majesty's inspectors, but will work in the field and will cost some £400,000. It is a considerable investment to support the voluntary and private sectors, and will help the SPPA. It should significantly ease the pressure on the SPPA's core grant.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) raised some issues outwith the voucher initiative, about the Scottish Qualifications Authority. He asked whether it would simplify the public's perception of qualifications and the myriad things that are going on. Bringing together the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council will provide a means of co-ordinating educational pathways in Scotland. Certification of school, work-related and work-based awards will be handled by a single body and, as a result, there will less confusion about the range of provision on offer.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the SVEC's fees being a burden on employers, but in the interests of competitiveness, all employers must invest in the education and training of their staff to optimise efficiency, productivity and output. In the past year, the SVEC was able to reduce its fees by becoming more efficient and it has held those fees level. I expect that the new body will be able to maintain the service being given by the SVEC.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the SEB cutting corners to save money in relation to pre-testing of questions. The SEB's reputation for quality is excellent. That is known and valued throughout the Scottish education system. The SEB's commitment to quality cannot be and is not in doubt, and I am confident that it will ensure that that quality is maintained. We will ensure that the SQA will build on the reputations of both bodies in a variety of areas, but especially in relation to quality, and the Bill makes specific mention of this.

Also in relation to the SQA, the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) asked about whether special educational needs provision was adequate. If he is listening, I can tell him that the Bill makes provision for the SQA to take over the functions of SEB and SVEC, including the procedures for special needs candidates. The "Higher Still" initiative shows that improvements in standards and quality are not incompatible with special educational needs. The access level of "Higher Still" qualifications has been widely welcomed by those interested in special educational needs. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the underfunding of the SQA. We expect it to be self-financing, so that question does not arise.

We have also heard much criticism, especially from the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), about our proposals for national testing, but what she has not admitted is that the atrocious level of testing in Scottish secondary schools has to be improved. When I challenged

the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in the Scottish Grand Committee to say whether he condoned the low levels of testing, he said nothing. I now ask the hon. Lady whether she condones or condemns the appalling levels of testing at S1 and S2.

Mrs. Liddell: I am interested in the Minister's diversion. He has introduced a proposal for compulsory testing at S1 and S2 in secondary schools. This is not about levels of testing that do or do not exist; it is about compulsory testing being introduced as a qualification, as the Secretary of State said. The Minister would do better to explain exactly what the Government are up to.

Mr. Robertson: I will ask the hon. Lady again: does she approve of a 6 per cent. level for maths, a 7 per cent. level for reading and a 5 per cent. level for writing? Is she happy with that? I shall keep talking while she gets the answer from her colleague.

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Perhaps he will explain why the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), the former Secretary of State for Scotland, backed down from that position. I am happy to stand by the education record of Labour-controlled local authorities in Scotland because they have saved education from the depredations of the Minister and his right hon. Friend.

Mr. Robertson: So the hon. Lady is now saying that she is happy to defend Tayside region, which achieved 0 per cent. in reading, 0 per cent. in writing and 0 per cent. in mathematics, and Central region, which achieved 7 per cent. in reading, 1 per cent. in mathematics and 1 per cent. in writing. Does the hon. Lady think that that is an acceptable level of testing for Scottish parents for the very basics of education? I ask her for a third time—is she defending what is or is not happening in the vital first two years of Scotland's secondary schools?

Mrs. Liddell: Perhaps you could guide me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether this is parliamentary language, but was that not gibberish? Given that this system of testing was introduced by the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, why on earth is the Minister getting himself into such a fankle?

Mr. Robertson: Here we have it. At 3.30 this afternoon, the Opposition were against it, but word got out to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—"Do you realise what the Scottish element of the party has just said—that we are against improving standards in Scotland and against testing? Get the policy changed before the wind-up at 9.30 pm."

Education authorities had the time to improve their performance, but made no tangible progress. The reality is that they will do nothing unless they are compelled to do so. The time has come to take powers to ensure that those authorities can no longer stand in the way of the full implementation of the system of national testing, and the five-to-14 programme of which it is an integral part, which has already proved of immense benefit to teachers, parents and pupils.

The future prosperity of Scotland relies on the performance of our education and training system. The Bill reaffirms our continuing commitment to the training system and takes forward proposals to enable our present system, with its high and improving standards, to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Our aim is nothing short of the improvement of Scottish education, improvement in the quality of provision offered to the Scottish people, and an improvement in the standards of education they achieve.

Our aim is an increase in diversity within the system and the ability to take advantage of that by promoting freedom of choice. This Bill is part of our drive to achieve those objectives, and we are confident that the voucher system provides the best means of ensuring the expansion of preschool education. We are confident that our proposals for national testing will raise standards, to keep Scottish education up there with the best.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 276.

Division No. 133] **[21.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John

Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Peter Hain.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Mates and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 273, Noes 40.

Division No. 134] **[22.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David

Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Bates and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michie, Mrs. Ray Argyll Bute
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Pike, Peter L
Rendel, David
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills), That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee—[*Mr. George Robertson.*]

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 268.

Division No. 135] **[22.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warning, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Hain and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*

Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Bill stood committed to a Scottish Standing Committee, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*] [MONEY]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State as payments of grants or other payments made in pursuance of section 13 of the Act;

(b) any sums required to enable the Secretary of State to make loans to the Scottish Qualifications Authority under section 14 of the Act;

(c) any sums required by the Secretary of State for fulfilling a guarantee under section 15 of the Act;

(d) any sums required by the Secretary of State as payments of grants made in pursuance of section 23 of and Schedule 3 to the Act;

(e) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(f) any increases attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act; and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by the Secretary of State in pursuance of sections 14 and 15 of the Act.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) BILL *[LORDS]*

Ordered,

That the Education (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by the Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (SCOTLAND)

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94F(1)(b) (Scottish Grand Committee (statutory instruments)),

That the Special Grant Report on Community Care Special Grant and Supplementary Mismatch Scheme Grant for 1996-97 be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5179/96, relating to policies aimed at establishing fairer competition between the various modes of transport, and endorses the Government's approach to the policy of internalising the external costs of transport wherever possible.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Gun Control

10.42 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I am honoured to present tonight a petition organised by the *Evening Echo*, the only daily local newspaper in south-east Essex. The petition was signed by 1,088 people, but I know that it represents the views of most of the public in so far as it seeks to tighten gun laws generally. In detail, the petition may be flawed: in spirit, it is praiseworthy, and has my full support. On this issue, the *Evening Echo* is to be congratulated on the great public service it has done.

The terms of the petition are:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled, the Humble Petition of the residents of South East Essex and the surrounding area, showeth That we, the undersigned, call for urgent Government action to tighten the regulations on the carrying and licensing of guns. We urge that a total ban on guns being kept outside a licensed place of work or registered gun club, and a tightening of controls on the issuing of gun licences, with a yearly review of licence holders, be adopted.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge the right hon. Michael Howard, MP, Home Secretary, to use his powers to tighten gun laws.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Services (Buckinghamshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.43 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I am grateful for the opportunity for an Adjournment debate because I fear that social services in Buckinghamshire are coming under severe strain and that a similar pattern may repeat itself across the country. What is emerging is not just a financial but a structural problem.

The Government are providing more money each year for social services and community care, but the demand created by the 1990 community care legislation in particular is ever-increasing. When that demand overtakes the supply of new money, local authorities have to ration services. We reach the crazy situation in which a steady increase in services and expenditure is perceived by the electorate as cuts. In Buckingham, for example, there is a day centre run by the Red Cross and funded by the social services department. The value of that kind of facility to elderly people forced to spend much of their time at home is clear, yet it is threatened with a reduced service to three days a week.

I have met representatives of Mencap, who are concerned about the effect of rationing on the elderly disabled. Like all hon. Members, I have seen evidence of the strain placed on local social services by increased family breakdown and have been appalled by the expense and complexity of caring for a single delinquent child or young adult, to keep him or her ending up an even more expensive guest in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be familiar with the problem of explaining the paradox whereby we spend ever more and are accused of making cuts. I have the same difficulty explaining that paradox to my constituents—they are not very interested in the paradox. All they know is that the threat to their day centre, services and the mentally infirm are real.

Politically, a chain reaction follows. Again, the process will be familiar to my hon. Friend the Minister. Members of Parliament are asked to intervene and come under pressure in the local press. We ask the county council what is going on. The council says that it has run out of money and needs to make, in this case, 9 per cent. cuts. I take up the problem with the Minister, who tells me that £57 million has been made available for community services in Buckinghamshire next year—10 per cent. more than in 1995-96. I find it hard to explain to constituents that their day centre will deliver a reduced service because the Government have given the council an increase three times the rate of inflation, so back I go to the council. Of course things turn out to be more complex than they seem.

I will not go over the council's detailed finances. We have asked for and been given a breakdown of its expenditure, and we have had full and frank discussions. We have gone into matters raised in the Minister's reply to me—for which I am grateful—such as the need for efficiency savings. We have also looked at administration costs and why they appear to be rising. The reason seems to be investment in information technology in the pursuit of more efficiency. Above all, we have looked at rising demand.

[Mr. George Walden]

I came away with the overriding impression that in the provision of social services and community care, we have embarked on an open-ended programme that will ultimately be unsustainable for any Government under any reasonable projection of the national income. Even if, for the sake of argument, Buckinghamshire county council could have managed things better, the consequent savings would have been a speck when seen against relentlessly growing demand. Friend as I am of efficiency savings, I am a friend also of logic. I fail to see how the council can be expected to produce money from such savings year by year until the trump of doom. There must come a point when the service in question is working efficiently and diminishing returns set in. It will not have escaped the Minister's notice that the American guru of downsizing in business has recently repented of his earlier enthusiasms.

I have noted in that connection the speeches by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), which fail to promise more money for the national health service and pretend that new resources can materialise from administration cuts alone—a line echoed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). There are strange alliances in the House. I am all for cutting administration to the bone but I do not see how the future of the service can be guaranteed in the long run by offcuts from administration. Even if NHS administrative costs, for example, are halved that would yield less than £1 billion from a £34 billion budget—some of which, as a result, might be spent less efficiently. The point may be reached where the same is true of care in the community.

The easiest way out for me is to blame the Government and to ask for more money. That would get me the reputation of a caring person, but it would prove the opposite. I would be guilty of gesture politics—which is to say, of cynicism. Asking for more money from a Government in debt to the tune of £25 billion would be more than cynical, it would be a charade.

I would, of course, welcome more money for Buckinghamshire county council social services if there is any to spare in the Minister's budget. But the same goes for education, where some of our primary classes are too big, or for the NHS, where, despite improvements, there are still delays in operations. In all those areas, the Government are already spending more.

The central question is: how are we to deal with infinite demand? Two simple facts that I read in the local government management board report on community care for 1995 illustrate the point: the number of admissions to residential and nursing homes has increased by nearly a quarter since 1993-94—a mere two years ago. Even more striking, the average net cost to the local authority of an intensive package of non-residential services now exceeds the average net cost of a residential home for old people. In other words, whether they are in or out of residential care, there is no escape from the cost of caring for the elderly.

To put things even more simply, I do not understand where the system is going. I can see how things can continue for a while longer as they are, but eventually the strains will show, under whatever Government. I have noted with interest the warnings of the shadow social security spokesman, who will not spend more than is already being spent. We are in a vicious circle. I suspect that there is a great deal of self-deception involved on all sides and much postponing of the day of reckoning. That day, I believe, will involve more targeting of expenditure on those in the greatest need.

That brings me to the main question that I wish to put to the Minister, who will be relieved that, for once, I really will not ask him for more money. The Government have guided local authorities towards a policy of looking for a person-based approach to assess clients' needs. Buckinghamshire county council has been looking at the possibility of replacing an item-by-item flat-rate charge with a more streamlined approach—streamlined obviously being a euphemism for variable charges based, of course, on ability to pay.

Despite new home care charges introduced in 1995, individuals with the financial means to contribute a reasonable amount towards their care continue to be charged the same amount as those who are among the least well-off in the community. That means that well-off people are getting subsidised services and that that subsidy is financed, at least in part, through the taxes paid by people in work who may be less well-off than themselves. Where is the equity in that?

One inhibition to moving away from a flat-rate approach is the fear of legal challenge or recourse to the ombudsman. Would it not be of help to county councils such as Buckinghamshire if the Government recognised the facts about the costs of community care and introduced legislation to make ability to pay a criterion for the delivery of services. Unless the Government can promise that the spiral of spending will increase indefinitely—I doubt that they can—I see no other solution. Politically, I see very clearly that there would be a cost, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to imagine the political cost of headlines in the local newspapers, saying that day centres and services to the elderly disabled are under the axe.

10.52 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on raising the important subject of funding for social services in Buckinghamshire, and I am grateful to him for allowing me this opportunity to make a short contribution.

Yesterday morning, I attended a meeting in Coleshill of adults with learning disabilities. It is no easy task to explain to people who have regularly attended day centres five days a week that, in future, depending on what assessment is made of their needs, they may be able to attend only three days a week, or even only one day. When I first examined the problem, I could not for the life of me understand why, if Buckinghamshire social services had, as my hon. Friend said, more money to spend on social services, services to individual clients would be cut in this way.

When I looked at it, I began to appreciate the huge increase in expectations brought about by the community care legislation, which have led to the massive increase in demand to which my hon. Friend referred. It is an increase in demand right across social services. In particular, demand from the elderly to stay in their own homes, which we all want to encourage, has increased substantially. In addition, fortunately, adults with learning disabilities have a greater life expectancy today than they had previously. That is also creating extra demand on social services.

By and large, Buckinghamshire county council is a well-run and well-managed authority. Having examined the matter, I believe that it has approached it in the only sensible way—which has been to say that whereas in the past it was possible to provide for all the demand at day centres, as and when young people with learning disabilities left schools, that can no longer be so and there will have to be some sort of rationing based on need. In fact, the only basis for rationing is to say that the greatest resources will go to those people who have the greatest need. That is what is now being proposed.

Difficult decisions will have to made, which will be hard to explain to parent carers—people who are often taken for granted by society; people who devote hours of their time to looking after their children. Sometimes, they get no recognition from society. They do not understand why these changes have to be made. As my hon. Friend said, we have to face the fact that, quite frankly, whatever resources are provided—and we would all like there to be more, although Buckinghamshire is already spending above its standard spending assessment on social services—will be inadequate to meet future demand. In fact, Buckinghamshire social services department has been commended by the Audit Commission for having adopted a rational approach to the matter.

As we look at the finances and at the number of people and as we talk about demand, we must remember that we are also talking about individuals, many of whom desperately need help from social services. Of all the groups that need help, those who most need it are those with some sort of disability. Perhaps the mark of a civilised society is the resources that we devote to those people.

Of course it is important—and Buckinghamshire social services attach great importance to this—that we meet the needs of children. In fact, the council has not been able to make any reductions in its budget for that because it is constrained by the law. It has had to make reductions in the help that it provides for old people and people with disabilities. I believe that it has approached the problem in a sensible way. However, as my hon. Friend said, it is important that we have a rational and intelligent debate about it. I congratulate him on raising the subject this evening.

10.57 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on securing this debate. I am grateful to him for allowing me to make a few brief remarks.

I wholly endorse the arguments of my hon. Friend and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I, too, have been pressed by the very real dilemmas that are faced by Buckinghamshire county council in making difficult judgments about how to allocate an increased budget, year on year, in the face of even greater increases in demand from people who look to its social services department for support.

I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield in asking for particular weight to be given, by both central and local government decision makers, to the challenges faced by the parents of mentally handicapped children. Unlike, for example, the adult children of very elderly and frail people, the parents of a mentally handicapped child face a lifetime's responsibility and commitment. We need to think carefully about how to ensure that our policies reflect the obligations that those people undertake on behalf of their children and of society as a whole. When we debate in an intelligent and rational manner such issues as changes to the charging regime or means testing, we need to take account of the fact that families face what might be termed a life sentence, not merely a commitment that will last only a small number of years.

I should like to draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to two other points. I hope that he will reply, if not at the end of the debate, then possibly in writing thereafter. The first was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. Buckinghamshire county council has told local Members of Parliament that, by law, it is unable to apply the same rationing criteria to services for children that it can to other social services, so it argues that the matter has not yet been tested in a leading case before the courts. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister can provide further enlightenment on that issue.

Secondly, I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the possible implications of the impending split between Milton Keynes, which will become a unitary authority, and the residuary Buckinghamshire county council. Early indications are that the division of resources and SSAs will be weighted towards Milton Keynes in a way that is disproportionate to the populations of the two successor local authorities. If those early indications are followed through, the residuary Buckinghamshire county council might face great budgetary difficulties as a result of a large reduction in its SSA for 1997-98. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, with his social services responsibilities, will discuss that problem with his colleagues at the Department of the Environment.

11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): If my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) can bear it, may I be the third hon. Member to congratulate him on raising this subject and on his contribution? I do so with all sincerity because he has not asked me for any extra money, so it is a delight to answer the debate. He has, however, raised some important issues and points, as have my hon. Friends the Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

The debate is about the quandary of considerably more resources going into a service, yet the service being managed in such a way in some parts of the country that services for people who need them have been reduced. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham asks where the system is going. The answer is that it is going in the direction of a partnership between taxpayers, rate payers, families and individuals, supported by private and voluntary sectors. In the years ahead, how one creates the mix of that partnership will be fundamental.

My hon. Friend rightly refers to the Labour party's commitment for no extra resources, which is a bold statement for the Labour party, but it needs to be heard and understood throughout the country. He has suggested that more people could contribute and he will, no doubt, have read with interest the consultation paper on partnership schemes, which goes some way towards that, so that people can plan ahead, contribute and, as a result, protect some of their assets for their families.

[Mr. John Bowis]

My hon. Friend talked about the ability-to-pay criterion. That is there; it is in the system. It is a question of how it is used. Once the assessment has been made of an individual's need, the assessment of that individual's ability to contribute is relevant. It is required, of course, in relation to residential care. In relation to domiciliary day care, it is discretionary, but it is there and it is a question of how it might be developed. He rightly says that it is good that, through our community care policies, more people have been able to stay at home. Following that, there was a but and the dot dots of the argument as to how that can be afforded in future, taking into account demographic changes and other factors.

May I refer to my hon. Friends' points about disability needs? They rightly highlighted the need to consider especially carefully the needs of people with disabilities, whether they be physical, learning or mental health disabilities. Mentally handicapped children were referred to. Of course, a mentally handicapped child is not necessarily a child in the sense of being under age—he can be the child of someone who concludes that he is not going to outlive that child, which causes additional worries. What is planned for such children as they grow older and whether there are any cost implications are important matters.

Not so long ago, Mencap and others lobbied Parliament to highlight the issue of charging. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham has concentrated on the other side of the coin this evening. The lobby was genuinely concerned that charging might be unfair, but, because we have a discretionary system, every single local authority has the absolute discretion to exempt mentally handicapped people from any charge or to reduce the charge. That should be borne in mind.

My hon. Friends queried whether the rationing of services to children was legal. It is a question not of legality but of looking after children's interests as best one can. Clearly, if a child is in need, the local authority has a duty to protect that child. Yes, there are requirements relating to taking a child into care. Beyond that, there are the same restraints on authorities looking after children as there on them looking after elderly people, and authorities have to manage their child care services within a budget just as they do any other services.

Mention was made of the new unitary authority of Milton Keynes. We are watching the new authorities carefully to see how they establish themselves and how the transfer of responsibilities, resources and facilities is carried out. We have already seen the first wave of such authorities, such as Avon, Cleveland and others. The Department of Health, through its social services inspectorate, is working hard and even humble Ministers are attending conferences to try to ensure that the new generations—whether they be reduced generations such as in Buckinghamshire, or new generations taking on unitary authority status as in Milton Keynes—understand the social service needs of their areas.

I deal now with one of the main points behind the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham. He is right to say that personal social services is one of the largest elements of public spending. Such spending in England this year amounts to some £7.5 billion. That excludes the resources for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and, indeed, those spent by the Department of Social Security on preserved rights cases. That is up from £3.6 billion in 1990-91 and represents a real-terms increase of 68 per cent. For Buckinghamshire, total personal social services resources were up from £32 million to £74 million in that period which, in real terms, is an increase of not 68 per cent. but 87 per cent. Spending on community care in Buckinghamshire rose from £22 million to £58 million—my hon. Friend mentioned a figure of some £57 million or £58 million—which is a real-terms increase of 112 per cent.

Buckinghamshire has also been fortunate in the two changes made in 1994-95—one to the special transitional grant distribution formula, which gave Buckinghamshire an extra £1.76 million, and one to the standard spending assessment, which gave it an additional £3.4 million, neither of which sums it would necessarily have planned to receive had the changes not been made. Buckinghamshire has been dealt with fairly, and there has been a substantial commitment to put the Government's, or taxpayer's, money where our policy is.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there is an ancient British custom according to which all would be well if only the Government would give us more money. That is the cry that we so often hear, but we have not heard it tonight, which is good.

We must remember that social services asked to have responsibility for community care, and most of them have responded well. Tributes have been paid in this debate to much of the work of Buckinghamshire social services. That was a 10-year implementation programme, and it needs to be managed effectively. The challenge is to manage the programme effectively, to obtain value for money, to identify priorities, to assess need and to listen to the views and preferences of local communities, individuals and carers.

Buckinghamshire has reviewed its services and decided as a policy for the county to switch £1.2 million into children's services. That is its prerogative, and I have absolutely no quarrel with the decision if that is what was assessed as the best use of resources. If resources are going to be switched into something, they will of course have to be switched out of something, and Buckinghamshire has decided that adult and elderly services should be reduced to provide money for children's services.

Buckinghamshire has also conducted a public consultation on priorities, which I certainly commend. It is always a good idea to consult the public on priorities, but we must remember that if we consult we will hear quite loudly from those who stand to lose out. Their voices will certainly be heard.

The lessons that all social services authorities must learn are the lessons that we have heard from the Audit Commission about better management of resources, better use of the independent sector and better manpower planning. The Audit Commission said that, across the country, it could see £500 million being saved with better staffing policies, without any threat to front-line service. That is not a bad figure to be putting into the pot if one is looking for ways of managing a tight demand for services in a substantially increased budget—which must nevertheless be managed very carefully if we are not to lose services that are deemed locally to be essential.

Public information is important. I believe that the community care charters that started to come into force on 1 April this year will enable local people to see for themselves what each social services authority is setting out as the range and standard of service that they have a right to expect—anything from the time that people should have to wait for an assessment through to local and national rights, such as the statutory direction and right on choice of home. We need to ensure that that is better understood by the public, and the public need to understand the eligibility criteria to discover whether they should qualify for services.

I believe that we do not want or need national standards. We want local priorities to set local standards, after consultation with local people, and then to publish those standards in local community care charters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham has dwelt particularly on the question of charging. We agreed that it is reasonable to make a charge to seek a contribution from a service user. Local authorities have absolute discretion whether to make charges for any non-residential adult personal social services. It is a matter for each local authority to decide whether to make such charges, what level they should be set at and what exemptions or discounts there should be for various categories of people.

The legislation of course requires that any charges levied must be reasonable and that if a person has difficulty meeting charges, he or she can make representations to have the charges reduced or waived. The charges must be reduced or waived if the authority considers it reasonable to do so. Once someone has been assessed as requiring a care service, that service should not be withdrawn because of an inability to pay for it.

The question of contributions is important. It is central to the thrust of the comments made in this debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham. If people make a fair contribution—remembering that the figure across the country is only 10 per cent., which could certainly be increased without causing hardship to people—that contribution can help to pay for more services.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 June 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dementia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

9.34 am

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I am pleased to have the opportunity today to debate long-stay care for people with dementia. This week is Dementia Awareness Week in Scotland, organised by Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia and I wish to take the opportunity to pay tribute to that organisation and the work that it does throughout the year, and to its sister organisation, the Alzheimer's Disease Society.

Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia have published an excellent report this week entitled "Putting Quality First". I intend to speak briefly about some of the points raised in the report and the action that I and others believe needs to be taken to improve long-stay care for people with dementia. I firmly believe that such action would be of benefit to everyone who may or may not need long-stay care for whatever reason at some time in the future.

The issues raised by debates such as this affect all of us and go to the heart of the values and principles of our society. A society such as ours has a moral obligation to provide quality personal long-stay care for all who need it, whether early in life through accident or disease or later through advancing age. I do not believe that the provision of long-stay care should be left to the individual and the marketplace, especially for those who have paid all their lives for the welfare state in the belief that long-stay care, if they ever required it, would be provided free at the point of need by the national health service.

The start of the report from Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia outlines the principles for long-stay care—choice, independence, dignity, privacy, fulfilment and rights. I hope that those principles will shape our discussion today.

I am sure that my hon. Friends and other hon. Members are aware that dementia is a disease characterised by damage to the brain cells which leads to a decline in intellectual and physical functioning. It is the fourth killer disease in old age, after cancer, heart disease and strokes. It is a complicated, lengthy and distressing illness that has severe consequences for the sufferers, their families and friends. The provision of high-quality long-stay care is an essential part of the continuum of care for people with dementia. It is not an optional extra, but is inevitable in the progress of the disease.

Currently, there are about 61,000 people with dementia in Scotland and 650,000 in the United Kingdom, of whom some 40 to 45 per cent. live in institutional care. It is reckoned that the growth rate in the number of people with dementia will be the same for the next 15 years as for the past 15 years, so we are not talking about some demographic time bomb, but about a predictable steady increase that can be planned for. The key questions we need to address are whether there will be enough long-stay care, whether it will be of quality and whether it will be in the right place for families and carers. Increasingly, throughout the United Kingdom, families, carers and sufferers of dementia find that the provision of long-stay care depends on where they happen to live, not on their needs. The provision is becoming more and more of a lottery.

I could not take part in a debate such as this without commenting on how the quantity and availability of NHS-provided long-stay care has been severely cut under the Government. Since 1992 alone, the number of NHS long-stay beds in Scotland has been cut by nearly 4,000, but the number of long-stay beds in private nursing homes has dramatically increased. Of course, the Government claim that long-stay institutional care is being replaced by community care, but, all too often, NHS long-stay beds have been replaced by private ones for which care is means tested. Some are in nursing homes of 120 beds or more, and such homes are not suitable for the care of people with dementia. The Government's own guidelines recommend that homes providing continuing care for people with dementia should have no more than 30 places.

As I have said, NHS long-stay care free at the point of need has been replaced by means-tested care. I shall give a couple of case studies which clearly demonstrate the effect of that on families and carers. The first is that of Mr. and Mrs. T from Glasgow; obviously, they do not want to be named. Mr. T is 65 and has severe dementia. He had a professional career, but had to give up work early because of the illness, and his wife gave up her work three years before retirement age to care for him.

Mr. T was admitted to Woodilee hospital last October for assessment, and was discharged to a nursing home after six months. The hospital is due for closure, and he has to pay for the whole of that nursing home care. Mrs. T says that, if her husband could express his views, he would say that he has been let down by the national health service, and that she should not suffer financially because of his illness.

A second example is that of Mrs. S, a 64-year-old widow who has had Alzheimer's disease since 1986. In early 1994, the consultant psychiatrist decided that it was no longer possible for her to be cared for at home because of her increasingly complex needs. Her family were informed that it was possible for her to be cared for on the specialist hospital ward where she had received short respite care. However, some months later, the family were told that their mother's bed was no longer classified as long-stay, and that they would have to find a nursing home for her. That is the reality of what is happening throughout the country to people who require long-stay care for dementia.

The Alzheimer Scotland report recommends that there should be an equitable system for admission to NHS-funded long-stay care throughout Scotland, and, I am sure it would argue, throughout Britain, that is not subject to variations in local criteria but is based on the administration of nationally approved clinical assessment procedures. The Scottish Office's recent circular on the care programme approach delegates that whole area to local level and allows for variations.

[Ms Rachel Squire]

Alzheimer Scotland calls for the criteria for admission to NHS-funded long-stay care to include challenging behaviour that requires specialist care and seeks continuing nursing care for people with dementia who need 24-hour supervision. My third example clearly demonstrates what is currently happening in some parts of the country. Tony suffers from vascular dementia, including asthma, and he is cared for, yet again, by his wife. We should never forget the contribution of our nearly 7 million carers, many of whom care for many years for people with dementia.

Tony was cared for by his wife at home, and regular planned respite care was provided for both of them. His condition deteriorated and he was admitted to a general hospital with a chest infection. He was unable to speak, had difficulty in swallowing and was immobile. He was fed by gastric pump through his stomach. The consultant geriatrician decided that his condition did not merit NHS continuing care, and that he should be admitted to a nursing home which should be paid for by the patient. His condition further deteriorated, and the health authority ignored the recommendations of the GP. NHS continuing care was finally provided only when it seemed that Tony's death was imminent.

I shall now deal with the importance of not only the quantity but the quality of care. The Government should do all they can to provide a caring environment for people with dementia that promotes a sense of well-being and maximises a person's sense of independence and dignity. I am sure that all hon. Members want to see an end to the days when one walks into the living room of a residential or nursing home and sees people sitting on chairs with their backs against the wall, staring blankly into space, sitting half asleep or muttering or shouting, with no stimulation and no social care. The only care is for their physical needs.

The Government can end such scenes by acting on the recommendations in the Alzheimer Scotland report. I shall mention a few of the key points.

First, a full, well-recorded, multi-disciplinary assessment should take place when a person enters care, and should be repeated regularly thereafter. That is a rehabilitative rather than a negative approach. Kenny McKie, one of my constituents who is a qualified nurse and the manager of a high-quality dementia care establishment, told me, "Everyone has potential in them. On-going assessment of people with dementia is very important. With good care, you can reverse it in some areas and delay the process in others." I pay tribute to Mr. McKie and to his staff for their work.

The second important issue is a national dementia care training initiative which ensures that staff are constantly trained and that staff levels allow for such training. That key concern was mentioned recently by carers in Lothian in a survey of their views on the quality of care. The third area needing action related to legislation for a unified system of registration and inspection of residential and nursing homes. There is a false division between health and social care, and current legislation is inadequate and out of date.

The fourth essential for quality care is a unified care system, the aim of which is to ensure that people who need care throughout their lives should receive it in just one setting, and should not be shoved from pillar to post as the dementia worsens. My final recommendation is the call in the report and elsewhere for a full review of the policy on paying for long-stay care. I support my party's call for the Government to set up a royal commission to examine the cost and funding of such care.

The Government's proposals for private insurance are a disgrace. They would benefit only the insurance industry, and would be too expensive for the majority of people. They make no allowance for such matters as broken employment, ill health and small savings, and would do nothing for those who in future may be subject to genetic testing for forms of dementia.

I know that many hon. Members wish to contribute, and I thank them for coming this morning to participate in the debate. Alzheimer Scotland's report is called "Putting Quality First", and quality personal long-stay care is in all our interests. We can never predict when we or a loved one may need it. Universal and equal access to quality long-term care should be part of the foundation of a caring and compassionate society. We never question the importance or cost of providing high-quality emergency services or high-quality intensive paediatric care, so why should we question the importance or cost of putting quality first for people with dementia and their carers?

I hope that the Minister and his Government will act swiftly to implement the recommendations in the report.

9.50 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on a first-rate introduction to the report, and on initiating the debate. I am afraid that I have not seen the report, but her comprehensive speech covered the very important issues contained in it, and the organisation concerned will be pleased that she has been able to initiate the debate.

I speak from personal experience on this issue. When I first entered this place, in 1987, two things happened: first, I shook hands with the Speaker—not the current Speaker—and secondly I promptly went down with chicken pox, which was extremely painful, and was off for a month, but I do not suggest that the two things are connected. A less amusing fact was that, at the time, my mother, unfortunately, was diagnosed as suffering from dementia. I have worked in social work for many years—all my working life, in fact—and the experience of having a member of one's family on the receiving end taught me some important lessons, many of which were touched on by my hon. Friend.

Fortunately, my mother was in sheltered housing, in a very caring environment, in my local authority of Wakefield. She had reached the stage when she wandered during the night, but the problem was that there were no staff to ensure that she did not. The various elements of community care for someone in her circumstances were in distinct blocks, which never met. She was deemed to be a housing case, but there was no care provision. We had a very caring warden, to whom I shall be grateful for the rest of my life, but she could not get up during the night to stop my mother wandering. The health provision did not relate to the care provision.

I do not in any way knock the people who were concerned with my mother's care, as we received, at the time, the very best possible care, and I am most grateful for that, but it taught me some important lessons.

We should not consider community care in terms of individual blocks of providers. When someone is suffering from dementia—certainly in my mother's case—and their needs cross the various boundaries, the current organisation of that care leaves much to be desired. Because there was no care provision during the night in that sheltered housing block, my mother ended up in just the environment described by my hon. Friend: a lock-up care home, sharing a bedroom with a complete stranger and wandering around the home with other demented people.

The time that my mother spent in that home was the worst period of my life. If I am portrayed as anti-institution, it is because I saw what that experience did to a member of my family and do not want it to happen to others. My hon. Friend put her finger on the point when she said that we must examine the provision that is available now, particularly in the private sector, where long-stay geriatric units are being replaced by large private nursing homes without stimulation or individualised care.

With current Government policy, I am concerned that we seem to have abandoned any element of organisational framework for community care. I make a specific plea in relation to the care of people suffering from dementia. We should think about our responsibility for planning care for people whose needs do not neatly slot into some organisational category of health or social care. In dementia—more, perhaps, than in any other area—people's needs stretch way across such organisational boundaries.

I am sad to say that the organisation of community care has worsened rather than improved in recent years. We have seen the community care changes, but I regret to say that we have also seen the total abandonment of any form of national organisation of health and community care, which is now left to the market. The internal market in the NHS is totally fragmented, and community care is left to individual entrepreneurs to provide what they consider will make the most profit. That has left us with a range of problems that must be urgently addressed.

I recognise that dementia takes many forms and that there are different levels of functioning. It is wrong to categorise people who suffer from dementia. In my mother's case, the illness was progressive and changed over a number of years. At different stages, different forms of provision were required. I am worried that the system is not flexible enough to respond to those changes as a person's circumstances change.

Care provision should relate to individual functioning, but it does not necessarily have to be catered for only within institutional care. I regret that we have returned to the model of institutional care—that, if anybody has community care needs, those needs must be dealt with in an institutional framework. People have seen the explosion in private nursing homes and private care homes, which are growing throughout the country. I would argue against that, as I feel that my mother ended up with a bad deal, not through the fault of the local people who tried to help her but through the lack of thought that was given to the models of care we have.

I shall give one example, from an adjacent constituency. The relatives of an elderly man who had been admitted to a care home with dementia came to me about the problems that he was causing through wandering from his care home back to the council bungalow where he had previously lived. The elderly woman who lived in the bungalow was disturbed because he kept coming back. As a result, she was prepared to move elsewhere.

The chap came out of the care home and moved back into the bungalow and was given a support package to remain there, because he saw it as his home. He could not understand why he had been moved to an alien environment. The council, in a caring way, adjusted his environment in the bungalow to reduce the risk, to ensure that he did not leave gas taps on and that he was not wandering during the night. His condition was monitored throughout the day, which can now be done through various means. He did not need to be in an institutional setting.

I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend about a continuum of care. We need a continuum that can respond to a person's individual circumstances at any time, particularly in relation to dementia. We must move away from the overwhelming obsession with institutional care, particularly for people who have various forms of confusion and dementia.

Not long ago, my hon. Friend and I were in Norway to study that country's models of care and housing. Denmark passed a law making it illegal to have institutional care. Its models are based on a housing approach. Our models are the workhouse modernised. I am ashamed that, at this point in the 20th century, the old public assistance institution still dominates in our view of what should be offered to people with a variety of needs. Let us normalise our view of care and of how we would like to be cared for. I do not want to end up in a wall-to-wall geriatric situation staring at people with similar problems. I want to live in a normalised housing environment as long as I can. We can increasingly make such provision.

We must establish a proper organisational framework that reflects the new boundaries of community care. The social/nursing care divide went by the board years ago. It is nonsense to retain rigid organisational boundaries between the NHS, local authority, nursing and social care.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) knows well my view that our party should review its policy on the connection between local authority and NHS provision. There should be one body in charge of community care. As long as a divide remains, some people will fall between the two factions and not be helped. My hon. Friend knows where I am coming from, and I know where he is coming from, but I hope that we may meet in the middle and agree a just policy that satisfies our respective views. The new organisational framework must address the models of care I have described, increasingly to embrace the housing model and how it can offer people a far more civilised deal.

I will conclude, as I am being looked at by my Whip. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) is a caring Whip, who concerns herself with community care and has a good track record on that issue.

My final point reinforces what my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West said about the Government's recent announcements on private insurance. Their message is that any problem in old age is for the individual, who must ensure that he or she has the right insurance policy—that one must look after number one, because the state will not provide. That is

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

not good enough in relation to dementia. We must reinstate our belief since the introduction of the welfare state in the 1940s that we have a collective responsibility to care for people with needs of the kind that my hon. Friend described.

10.2 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I want to draw the Minister's attention to serious allegations that health and local authorities are misinterpreting their duties and powers in law, in the provision of long-stay care for dementia sufferers.

I wrote to the Under–Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), last November about the case of my constituent, Mrs. Valerie Richardson. In March 1995, Mrs. Richardson's mother-in-law was diagnosed as suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Her consultant advised that she should be discharged from hospital into a nursing home. Mrs. Richardson asked whether the NHS would be providing a bed, and was told—rightly in my view—that her mother-in-law's needs came first and that Mrs. Richardson should not worry about costs until her relative was settled.

Without Mrs. Richardson's knowledge, or her consent as the person with power of attorney, social services became involved, and threatened court action to place a charge on her mother-in-law's property. Mrs. Richardson, as many people know, is not a woman to be bullied. Fourteen months later, her mother-in-law continues to be cared for in hospital by the NHS while she awaits a proper home care package. She has not joined the 40,000 pensioners who in the last year alone have been forced to sell their homes to pay for care. As a result of Mrs. Richardson's dogged stand, the health authority and social services face court proceedings challenging the legality of their actions.

Two points are at issue. Health authorities and local authorities stand accused of exercising powers outside the law. Perhaps more serious, by those actions clinicians, health administrators and social workers are at risk of charges of criminal negligence for carrying out such instructions. That risk exists in the case of clinicians for abrogating their responsibilities; and in the case of administrators and social workers, for assuming responsibilities for medical care for which they are unqualified.

The Under-Secretary wrote to me in January to inform me that, under section 22 of the National Health Service Act 1977, health and social service authorities have a statutory duty to work closely together. I replied in detail and at length in March, pointing out that the various Acts dealing with national assistance, welfare services and community care are open to contradiction.

In particular, under the National Assistance Act 1948, local authorities are barred from providing services or accommodation to meet any medical requirements. Those are defined as the responsibility of the NHS, and include a duty

"to provide the treatment of people with mental illness"

and

"to provide those services free of charge".

However, the Residential Accommodation Regulations 1992 allow health authorities to give consent for nursing care accommodation to be provided under the 1948 Act, but with the health authority purchasing the bed. The statutory instruments fail to recognise that the 1948 Act bars local authorities from providing accommodation for infirm patients, including those who suffer from mental disorder—a recipe for chaos and confusion. We are seeing as a result a programme of enforced residential care for pensioners with serious health problems. Health and local authorities are substituting social care needs for health care.

Patients receiving care under health service Acts are reclassified as requiring the provisions of the 1948 Act, which are means-tested. The consequential forced realisation of patients' assets to pay for their care is open to strong challenge as being without legal foundation. Medical treatment for medically disordered patients must under statute be provided free of charge. Social services cannot give treatment, and have no statutory powers to do so.

The misinterpretation of legislation places medical staff and social workers at risk to charges of negligence. The Under-Secretary's reply in January stated:

"It will be appropriate in some cases for a health authority to decide, taking into account all relevant considerations including clinical advice and resources available, that it is no longer appropriate to provide a person with NHS care."

The Minister was saying that hospital administrators with no medical qualifications will decide, on the basis of available resources, whether a patient needs continuing medical care, yet the statutory guidelines on hospital discharge arrangements state:

"All consultants are responsible for the medical care of their patients. They are responsible for deciding when a patient no longer needs acute care . . . The consultant will decide whether the patient needs continuing care arranged and funded by the NHS."

Clinicians who abdicate their responsibilities to administrators, and the social workers who implement their decisions, all stand exposed to charges of negligence for acting outside their statutory powers. That view is shared by the health service ombudsman, following complaints about the health commission that covers my constituency. He has only recently issued a stern warning to NHS managers that they should follow doctors' advice when discharging patients from hospital.

I remind the Minister that the ombudsman was called in following complaints against North and Mid Hampshire health commission, which had discharged 24 elderly dementia patients from hospital to private nursing homes. Within two weeks of their discharge, eight had died. Five of the patients who died were discharged against the express wishes of medical staff, who advised that they were too ill to be moved. Doctors were overruled by managers, who went ahead as part of the health commission's plan to close wards for elderly dementia patients as a money-saving measure.

The ombudsman's report makes it clear that the health authority paid scant regard to the statutory guidelines on hospital discharge and that it was "deplorable"—his word—that elderly patients were left without proper medical cover. As a result, the ombudsman has issued a grim warning to any other authorities that are planning to close long-stay hospitals.

Will the Minister please accept, therefore, that there is clear evidence that health and local authorities are acting outside their powers in the provision of care for dementia

patients through ignorance, confusion, or, as the ombudsman has found, by deliberately flouting statutory guidelines? Will the Minister accept that those actions are placing health and social service staff at risk to charges of negligence? Will he review the legislation to confirm that it is the NHS that is obliged to provide medical care for dementia sufferers, or will he introduce statutory amendments making it clear to the House that the Government intend this to be the province of the social services, with all that that implies?

10.11 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on bringing this subject before us. Like other hon. Members, I speak from experience. I have a loved one who suffered from Alzheimer's: my late father-in-law Thomas McLay. Unfortunately, he recently died.

He left school at 14 and never had a lazy bone in his body. He worked hard as a miner, and he could have been described as an employer's dream, because, when he had to start work at 6 in the morning, he was there half an hour before, ready to start his shift. He did that whatever time he started. He brought up a family of 13. When the war came, he did his work with the Royal Artillery. I am painting of picture of a someone who asked nothing of any one. He brought up his family along with his wife Margaret. The first time he needed help from the state was when he became an Alzheimer's sufferer.

My mother-in-law, who has also recently died, was determined that Thomas, with whom she had been married for 60 years, would not go into a home, and that she would be the carer in the family. When we talk about carers, the word sometimes rolls off the tongue, but we forget that carers are sometimes aged 70 or 80 years of age, and that they are not always physically fit.

As the Minister knows, I rarely criticise the local authority, but the behaviour of Strathclyde regional council, the biggest local authority in Scotland, if not in the United Kingdom, which is now the City of Glasgow council, in looking after my father-in-law and my mother-in-law, who was a carer, was deplorable. The one thing that we as Members are reluctant to do is fight on behalf of our relatives in case we are accused of putting our nose in, but one day I had absolutely had enough. This man had worked hard all his life. Why should he not get representation from his son-in-law?

I spent half an hour talking to a social worker, and I discovered that she had not been in the family home for 18 months. Things had changed. Sufferers do not one day go along to the doctor, who tells them, "You have Alzheimer's disease." It does not work like that. People start to act irrationally and, often, relatives and the doctor do not know what is going on. It is a gradual process.

Sometimes, as happened with the mother of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), sufferers wander away. In my father-in-law's case, it was a form of paranoia. He was worried about people looking into his home, and that someone was following him. He had a thing about his rent being behind, but there was nothing wrong: his rent had never been in arrears.

For 18 months, a social worker had not turned up. I said to her, "Are you going to turn up?" She quoted the wrong telephone number, and I discovered that she was reading from the file of a family who lived three miles from my mother-in-law and father-in-law. That was the support we received.

I have another criticism. My wife and her sister rightly said that they were going to support their mother. When they turned up in the home and officials from the social work department were present, they deliberately turned their backs on the two daughters and addressed themselves only to the 80-year-old woman who was the carer.

That is a bad example from an organisation that says that it wants to keep families together and to support them, yet any time that the daughters were showing support, it deliberately turned its back. There must be a policy in that social work department, because not only the social worker, but the occupational therapist and many others acted in that way.

I have heard Ministers with responsibility for social security talk about the support we give to carers, but no one came to me and my mother-in-law to say, "This is what you are entitled to." She eventually received various grants and support from the Department of Social Security, but all that was in dribs and drabs. When we wondered whether my father-in-law would be entitled to death gratuities that ex-soldiers were receiving, he was so far into his illness that he could not remember his old Army number, and that delayed his receiving the very thing he was entitled to.

If we are going to say to people, "Be good carers," as a society we must give support. My mother-in-law kept a bed free in the national health service because she wanted her loved one to stay at home, but she was not thinking in economic terms to save the Government money. By doing that, she saved the NHS and the social work department a fortune, and she received no thanks for doing so.

The one organisation to which I give credit was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West: Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia. A girl there called Isabel Marr was prepared to tell my mother-in-law, my wife and her sister, "This is what is happening to your father, to the man you love. Here are the changes that he will endure during his illness."

As we all know, Alzheimer's and dementia patients tend to catch illnesses quickly. Flu can turn into pneumonia, and they are immediately admitted to hospital. There is a habit in our hospitals, which we all have a great regard for: they give a patient with dementia the strongest tranquilisers that they have in the ward. That is not only dangerous, but insulting to patients. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West rightly stated, although the patient can be suffering in terms of being unable to communicate in a certain way and it is hard to get a conversation going, in many ways they can still think clearly.

Until his last day, my father-in-law could draw and paint beautiful pictures. We have them hanging framed in our home. Certain parts of his mind were still very active, and he needed stimulation, as we all do. However, in the ward for the elderly in the local hospital, there was not even one picture hanging on the walls. I argued about that with the hospital administrator. He asked why the hospital should put pictures on the wall. I said, "Because you've got pictures on your wall at home, so why shouldn't people living in the hospital, as their home, for a week or two have the same amenities?"

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

I am trying to get across to the Minister and anyone working in social services who might be listening the fact that carers must get 101 per cent. support. If we do not give them that, we will simply be sweeping the problem of dementia and Alzheimer's disease under the carpet. We will be letting other people deal with the problem behind their own doors.

It is ridiculous that, when an elderly person needs, for example, a specially adapted bath in his home, which has been recommended by the occupational therapist, the local authority sometimes says that, although there is a clear case for it, it has run out of money in the budget and that elderly person will have to wait until the next financial year. That is a sorry state of affairs. In this day and age, it is ridiculous that we cannot provide much-needed facilities because of constraints on the budget in a particular financial year.

10.21 am

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): It is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). The human need in the case he instanced spoke volumes.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) for initiating this debate. I am sure that thousands of people will be grateful to her for doing so. It is telling that this is the first major House of Commons debate on dementia for 10 years. It shows that, as politicians and policy makers, we have failed to meet the challenge that dementia presents.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Springburn, I acknowledge the carers in my constituency who have been so loyal to their parents, partners and friends. Every Member of Parliament who does his work conscientiously knows a small army of carers in his constituency. We know them to be very faithful and disciplined; their loyalty is outstanding. Without a shadow of doubt, they save the British state billions of pounds which otherwise would have to be expended in more formal caring environments.

To its great credit, *The Times* last week devoted a whole page to Alzheimer's disease and carers. I draw to the attention of the House what Richard Eyre, the director of the National Theatre, said in his very moving remarks:

"The personality starts to disappear and with it the humanity and the soul, leaving as if in mockery only the body to breathe and be fed."

He summed up the scene devastatingly well.

The disease is really a Cinderella disease, even though it is a common one, and even though it can strike as early as 30 years of age. I call it a Cinderella disease because only £10 per sufferer is spent on research, while £475 per cancer victim is spent on research. In that context, all credit must go to Alzheimer Scotland—Action for Dementia and the Alzheimer's Disease Society. I know the latter body reasonably well. It has a dedicated and lively staff. It has encouraged the discerning public to accept that the problem will not go away. The society is successful and respected, and it gets fine leadership from Mr. Harry Cayton and the devoted group around him.

I regret that, in recent years, the number of continuing care beds in the national health service has been cut by 40 per cent. I also regret that many more highly dependent people with dementia are paying for places in nursing or residential homes, whereas 10 years ago they would have been cared for by the NHS free at the point of delivery. I further regret that whether or not people get such care depends on where they live.

I want the Government to end what is in effect a lottery by taking up the Health Select Committee's proposals—first, for national eligibility criteria; and secondly, for a long-term care charter. Unless we follow the recommendations of the Select Committee, the disparities will be such that we will become a nation made up of district health services, rather than a truly national health service. That is the direction in which we are going, and it concerns me greatly.

In Wales, we believe that we invented the national health service. We certainly gave the great Aneurin Bevan to this House—and he, without a shadow of doubt, fashioned what was, and, indeed, may still be, the envy of the developed world by creating the great NHS. The problems faced by sufferers of Alzheimer's disease show that all is not well in our national health service.

The Government have issued a consultation paper entitled "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age". Some people will benefit from what is proposed, but some will not. I am concerned about the heavy role that the Government intend to hand to the insurance industry. The blunt truth is that long-term care insurance is not an affordable option for those who cannot make regular payments into an insurance policy. Many of the less well-off people live in Wales, my country. They have ill health, they have been in and out of work, and they sometimes have caring responsibilities.

Last Saturday, Ruth Davies came to see me in my constituency surgery. During a lengthy discussion, she told me about her mother's long illness—which may have been dementia or may have been Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. In my view, Ruth Davies has shown great filial loyalty to her mother. She cared for her in a very loving way, and that deserves to be recognised. Her letter, which I shall give the Minister, is quite harrowing. It is a summary of the problems of one person, on her own, who faced up to her responsibilities. I hope that, when the Minister reads that letter, he will endeavour to respond and to assist my constituent.

I formally ask the Government to avoid falling into the trap of a short-term solution, which would be fatal for the great challenge of Alzheimer's disease. The Select Committee points the way forward. Above all, I want a system that is equitable, universal and free from age discrimination.

10.29 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be brief, because I realise that there are time pressures, and I am sure that the hon. Members who have sat through this debate will be interested to hear the Minister's response to the very eloquent requests that have been made. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on the service she has performed for the House and for the community by initiating this debate, and on the sincerity, commitment and passion with which she opened it. These issues should be seriously examined by all hon. Members, and not solely in the course of an Adjournment debate.

Hon. Members have made personal comments in the course of this debate. I also have a parent who suffers from dementia and is in permanent nursing care. People

do not appreciate the trauma that such a situation can cause, not only for the individual but for the family and for friends and relatives. Physically, the parent is still the same person we love, who brought us up, who cared for us and who has done everything possible for our lives. But mentally, they are not the same person. To find that one of our loved ones is suffering from some form of dementia is one of the most psychologically and emotionally draining experiences a person can ever have.

It is good when families are supportive and when friends and relations are there to help one through such difficult times. Unfortunately, many people in our society do not have supportive families, and they are in the most distressing situation. I hope that we can find ways of building up care in the community services to help people who may not be as fortunate as I have been, with a supportive family to see me through particularly difficult times.

Reference has been made to community care in general. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) said, hon. Members write off to our directors of social work and to Ministers on behalf of our constituents, but it is only when something happens to us personally that we begin to realise the complexities that are involved in ensuring that there are health visitors, home-help services and general practitioners—all the services involved in ensuring that there is community care.

One of my current worries—I refer the Minister to the excellent series of articles in *The Herald* this week, which is a part of Dementia Awareness Week—is that, in the local government budget for Scotland for 1996-97, £53 million has been made available directly for community care funding, which

"leaves the councils with an increase of only 0.9 per cent. over last year's base expenditure, from which they must fund any wage increases as well as restructuring costs over and above what the Government have provided for."

How does 0.9 per cent. additional funding do anything for community care in our local authorities? That issue should be addressed.

Reference has also been made to institutions. We hate the word "institution", because it conjures up images of a Victorian era institution. I think that the hon. Member for Springburn mentioned Woodilee. That is in my former constituency, and I know exactly what he meant.

There is a stage at which residential, full-time nursing care becomes absolutely essential for many people. I was concerned about people in that situation when I read the Scottish Office's most recent "Statistical Bulletin", and saw that the private sector is growing while the state sector is shrinking. The bulletin deals with community care. I am sure that the Minister is aware of it, so I shall not rehearse all the arguments about the graph that it contains.

I should like to make two very basic points. First, dementia is an illness. It is far too easy to be dismissive and say, "The old lady or the old man is losing their marbles." It is an illness that should be diagnosed. I want fundamental research by the Government into this issue to try to ensure that people do not needlessly suffer from any form of dementia, whether it is Alzheimer's disease or some other aspect of dementia.

Secondly, means testing for people who need full-time nursing care should be abolished. Will the Minister tell us how much money is spent in the administration of means testing while beds are being removed from our hospitals and nursing homes? It is very strange that people who are now in their 80s—who perhaps lived through the first world war, gave all their commitment, paid national insurance contributions all their lives, who never asked for anything and were led to believe that they would be cared for when they needed to be in their old age—are now being denied that care. They did not have the opportunity of private insurance or anything like that. They paid their contributions and expected to be cared for. The concept of means testing and requiring people to sell their homes to pay for their care is absolutely despicable.

10.35 am

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on securing this extremely timely and important debate. I also pay tribute to all hon. Members who have taken part. They have spoken with a depth of compassion and understanding that properly reflect their involvement in care issues. Finally, I pay tribute to the Alzheimer's Disease Society, which does such an important job in Scotland and across the United Kingdom in campaigning on dementia issues.

As hon. Members are aware, Alzheimer's disease and dementia are chronic and degenerative diseases. In 25 years, it is estimated that approximately 1 million people in our country will suffer from dementia. As we have heard, the cost to individuals, their families and their carers is immense. The bill to society is also huge—an estimated £1 billion per annum in England. There is currently no known cause or cure for Alzheimer's disease, and it is one of the most serious medical challenges facing our society.

We live in an aging society. Increased life expectancy is certainly one of the great achievements of this century, and brings with it the potential for a richer and more fulfilling existence for each of us. But age-related illness and disability, particularly dementia, pose a serious threat to the realisation of the potential for healthy aging.

Yesterday I launched a new centre on aging, which will focus new research efforts on understanding and preventing the major causes of chronic ill health in older people. Created through a partnership between two of the north's great universities—Newcastle and Manchester—it will be a world leader in formulating new approaches to the treatment of diseases such as dementia. That such concentrated scientific and medical efforts are taking place in our public sector institutions to tackle an enormous social problem should be a great source of hope. I hope that the centre receives the support it deserves from Government.

A part of the centre's focus will be on developing more effective care delivery systems for elderly people. People with dementia are likely to be the major users of long-term care services in this country. They are also on the front line of the debate that is now taking place on the future of long-term care. That debate is long overdue. In some ways, it is very odd that the debate has not happened before now. Britain's elderly population have, after all, been around for a very long time—long enough for any competent Government to have planned for the challenge of their care.

The problem is that the Government have not done that planning. The elderly, their families and their carers are angry, and for very good reason. NHS disinvestment from

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continuing care has produced a redefinition of responsibilities between health care and social care. Continuing care, free at the point of use, has been all but rationed out of our national health service. Indeed, a report on psycho-geriatric continuing care beds published by the Alzheimer's Disease Society in 1993 showed that some health authorities had disinvested to such an extent that they provided no NHS beds at all for people with dementia.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: I am sorry; I do not have time.

Elderly people who now have to sell their homes—there are an estimated 40,000 such cases a year—are rightly furious because they had fondly believed that the taxes they paid covered care from the cradle to the grave. Instead, as we have heard this morning, all too often those people are shunted backwards and forwards between health authorities and local authorities which are desperately trying to divest themselves of the responsibility of care.

Worse still, by passing the buck to individual health authorities to decide what services should be available to elderly people, the Government have created a lottery in long-term care provision. The ADS survey of draft health authority eligibility criteria for continuing care, which was published just a month or so ago, found incomprehensible criteria and unacceptable variations in access to services. Quite simply, under this Government, where a person lives determines the care he receives and the price he pays. Such a lottery should have no part to play in our national health service or in any civilised system of community care.

Instead of tackling the mess they have created, the Government are in effect telling the public that we have a chaotic, perverse and unfair system of long-term care: "How can we, the Government, make you, the individual, pay for it?" The Government have got the starting point wrong—they are asking the wrong question to get the wrong answer. We believe that the debate has to begin with a much more fundamental question—what services will people need in their old age? Asking that different question is likely to lead to different answers.

First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West rightly pointed out, we know when and where population change will occur. The so-called demographic time bomb is not going to explode tomorrow. Its impact is being felt incrementally over several decades, so it is a change for which we can all plan. With dementia, for example, we know that there will be a steady rather than a dramatic growth in the number of people who will suffer from Alzheimer's and related conditions.

Secondly, the raw facts of change do not take into account the benefits—or the potential savings—that can flow from allowing elderly people to benefit to a much greater extent from preventive, rehabilitative and convalescent health programmes, so reducing the need for high levels of care, and delaying the onset of frailty.

Finally, I deal with a recurring theme in this debate. Providing new national mechanisms to ensure a continuum of care services among health authorities and local authorities could end the waste of time and money that currently bedevils the delivery of long-term care for elderly people. It is those people who suffer when health authorities and local authorities tussle over resources and responsibilities. That is why we are committed to new enforced national mechanisms to speed up co-operation among health services, social services and, crucially, housing services. The latter are all too often the forgotten partner in the family of community care services.

We want a continuum of care made available for the individual. That is especially important for people with dementia. The onset of dementia is very different from its terminal stages, so care needs will change over time. It is vital that services on the ground are equal across the country, which is why we support the Health Committee's call for a national framework that specifies eligibility criteria for long-term care to define what the NHS, as a national service, is to provide.

Our aim is straightforward. We want a national health service in which access to care is a matter of right, not chance. We want a national long-term care charter so that people know what they can expect from health services, housing services and social services. We want to end the market in the NHS, to remove the perverse incentive for hospitals to discharge patients too rapidly. We have called for a moratorium on the closure of hospital beds, because the closure programme has gone too far.

The NHS has continuing bed responsibilities, but it has other responsibilities, too. That is why we will seek a new role for convalescence, where rehabilitation, recovery and respite services not only help ease the transition between hospital and community but provide more help for carers whose needs must also be met. The ADS's "Right from the Start" report identified almost half the carers looking after people with Alzheimer's as being more than 70 years old. That matter was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). We have made a good start with the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, but it is only a start—we still need further changes.

Quality is the key challenge facing all providers of care. We want all care to be of the highest standard. Standards must be subject to appropriate scrutiny, which is why we want to bring all community care services—public and private, residential and domiciliary—within an independent regulation net. Several of my hon. Friends have expressed concern about the disturbing trend towards larger institutions. We shall be looking to define new standards, and, in particular, we want to examine whether quality of life in care homes is being compromised by economies of scale.

The reforms I have outlined will deal with the insecurity felt by elderly people about their future. The aim should be to allow people the security of knowing that a broad choice of services will be available when they grow old and to allow them to plan for old age by defining where the boundaries lie between provided and paid-for care. That certainty is what elderly people want; it is what their carers and their families want, and it is what they deserve.

10.48 am

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on having secured this

debate. People who suffer from dementia and those who tirelessly care for them deserve our understanding and support: I echo the words of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) who congratulated the hon. Member for Croydon, North–West (Mr. Wicks) on introducing the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 which substantially improved matters.

This debate is a welcome opportunity to restate the Government's and our personal commitment to making certain that people suffering from dementia receive the highest quality health and social care, which they need and deserve. In a moving speech, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) described his personal experiences.

Although this is Alzheimer's Week in Scotland, we must keep the needs of those suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia and our responses to them at the forefront of our minds all the time. I agree that large impersonal institutions are not the ideal surroundings for long-stay care, especially not in respect of the social aspects. The aim is to provide care in smaller, more homely settings, and to improve the opportunities for social stimulation.

Of course, community care planning involves health boards, local authorities and others in joint planning and a joint response to a continuous assessment of need. The aim is to reflect local needs and circumstances and to replace outdated institutional care with care that meets existing needs and will continue to do so.

The hon. Members for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) and for Wakefield highlighted the need for quality of care. Inspection teams should ensure that all homes have structured day activities for their residents. Teams can carry out unannounced visits to ensure that necessary stimulation takes place.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) raised the case of the Richardson family. It would not be appropriate for me to go into the detailed circumstances, but I stress that we have set out very clearly in England and Scotland the procedures that should be followed in arranging the continuing care of any person who has been in hospital. I would have expected those arrangements and procedures to be followed in that instance. The Under–Secretaries of State for Health, my hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and for Battersea will be responding to the hon. Gentleman, whose correspondence will be studied closely.

The hon. Member for Springburn made certain criticisms of unsatisfactory activities in the social work department. Those matters should be taken up with the director of social work. We have of course introduced a formal complaints procedure to examine alleged unsatisfactory care, and have strengthened the procedures.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) raised the important issue of research funding. I am happy to confirm that the Scottish Office chief scientist's office is always happy to consider and fund research proposals in that area. Similarly, the Department of Health will look sympathetically at any proposals. In Scotland, we provide significant funding to the dementia services development centre, which carries out research. That centre in Stirling was set up in 1989. We provide it with a core grant of £185,000. It provides information, development assistance, training and research to service planners and providers.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) mentioned funding. Funding of authorities reflects their lead role in planning and purchasing community care services. Councils in Scotland have received £662 million in community care resources this year—an increase of £41 million on the previous year. I say to the hon. Member for Darlington that expenditure on social care for older people has been increasing by an average of 9 per cent. in real terms for the past 15 years, from about £2 billion in 1980 to £7.3 billion last year.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that, since the Government have made adequate funds available, the question is not so much one of funds as the use of them? Is he aware that Essex county council increased its funding from £89 million in 1992 to £192 million today, but continues to misuse those resources by sending young thugs on safari holidays instead of providing proper levels of care? Essex county council is Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled.

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I am glad to hear that resources are being correctly applied with regard to community care in the area to which my hon. Friend referred. It is important that resources should follow the patient and that an agreed strategy is in place before any patient is moved. We are keen to make certain that that happens.

Mr. Milburn *rose—*

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I must move on to the points made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, since she initiated the debate.

She quite rightly wants the NHS and local authorities to attach priority to giving dementia a higher profile. We have commissioned work to develop a framework for mental health that will include consideration of the special needs of people with dementia, and, of course, their carers. We shall be consulting widely on the draft framework in the summer. Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia will be fully involved in the process. I should mention in passing that, for the few weeks that I was responsible for the community charge, I exempted those suffering from Alzheimer's. That was my only act of consequence while I had that responsibility.

I should like to refer to the report of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and her recommendations. The report was a very useful and constructive contribution, and we have referred it to a working group on residential care in Scotland, which will be reporting in a few weeks. I should like to go through some of her excellent points.

She called for better training for inspectors. We are examining that. The Scottish Office group will make recommendations in about three weeks, which are very likely to be to that effect. She called for better training of home staff. Inspectors check to ensure that staff are appropriately trained for the client group for which they care, especially dementia sufferers. Such provision has been in place for some time.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West called for a joint local authority and health board team. The Scottish Office group is considering that recommendation. It is encouraged by the good practice guidance, and is likely to support a mandatory position. She called for an

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

independent inspectorate, and the Scottish Office group is considering the need for it. She called for the encouragement of best practice. Consultation on nursing home national standards is being issued this week. The residential homes working group is examining the need for standards and, as I mentioned, will be reporting shortly.

The hon. Member called for better funding for more inspectors. The fee charged should cover the need. There should be no bar to increasing the fee if required. That should make the operators self-funding. The fee is, of course, paid by home owners. She called for the publishing of inspectors' reports. There is no bar to that, and I would encourage such openness. She called for tougher guidance on staffing levels. Inspection teams must ensure the appropriate level of staff for the number and dependency of residents. She also called for tougher enforcement of standards, including quick closure where necessary because standards have not been implemented. The working group is examining simplifying and speeding up the procedures. The system must be fair to owners and clients alike.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West called for national standards and work is under way on it. She called for the registering of sheltered housing and domiciliary care. I understand that that is likely to be one of the group's recommendations. She called for an urgent review of the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938. The board is examining the need for that and we shall be happy to consider amending the law in the light of the review. All her points have either been implemented or are in the process of being dealt with. I assure the House that I shall act speedily as soon as I receive the working group's recommendations.

Ms Rachel Squire: I want to make it clear to hon. Members that the Minister is referring not only to what I have said in this debate about the Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia's report, "Putting Quality First", but to a report that I conducted last year on registration and inspection procedures for residential and nursing homes in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I am glad to confirm that we either have acted or are acting in relation to the hon. Lady's points, which have been helpful.

The number of beds has been referred to. Where NHS continuing care is required, it will be paid for in full by the NHS regardless of whether that care is provided in an NHS hospital or by another provider under contract with the NHS. An assessment of needs by local authorities and health boards aims to ensure that provision will match needs. From 1 April, there will be a new two-stage appeals system for patients who want a review of the clinical aspects of their care, including discharge decisions. The hon. Member for Darlington—

Ms Squire *rose—*

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: I should like to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about eligibility criteria.

A framework has been established in Scotland and England for eligibility for NHS continuing care based on clinical factors. It would not be possible to set very detailed criteria nationally, because it would stifle local flexibility to meet the needs, and, owing to the historic variation of provision, would cause immense disruption.

To give an indication of the size of the problem, about 600,000 people suffer from dementia in the United Kingdom. That total is predicted to rise to 800,000 by 2000—one in 12 of the population aged over 65. We therefore have to make certain that we have in place a strategy and services that appropriately meet needs.

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the sterling work of the Alzheimer's Disease Society, Alzheimer Scotland—Action on Dementia, and all the other groups working in the field. We want to ensure that the reforms involve making certain that local authorities should have responsibility to work closely with health and housing authorities in a co-ordinated way to develop joint community care plans and co-ordinate services at the strategic level.

Local authorities now have greater flexibility in how resources for community care should be deployed to meet the needs of individual groups. We believe that local authorities throughout the country have used that greater flexibility to provide care that is better tailored to people's needs. In developing a full range of local services, the voluntary sector has and will continue to have a very important role in the provision of services—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Primary Schools

11 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Education is our key political problem. If we get education right, we will create the means to resolve all our other difficulties. We shall generate the wealth to invest in the health service and the means to give pensioners a better deal. Better education gives more people a stake in society. If we get education right, there will be fewer disaffected people therefore there will be fewer law and order and environmental problems. If we do not get education right, however, we shall be firefighting on all other fronts.

After national security and the defence of our sovereignty and democracy, education is our key political problem. Primary education is the key to success. If we get the foundation right, the rest will be easy. If we do not, whatever we do at the secondary level and however much money we throw at it, our efforts will be wasted and we will never overcome the problems.

There are three essentials that children must have when they start school as rising fives. The first is discipline. Without a sound framework of discipline, they will not enjoy their time at school and they will not benefit from it. So discipline is an absolute prerequisite. Secondly, we must give them joy in and enthusiasm for learning. Teachers and parents are responsible for that. Thirdly, we must give them knowledge and the skills that they need to apply that knowledge, particularly the skill of reading, to which I shall return in a moment.

I shall set out today that too many children are failing to reach standards appropriate to their ability and their age; that funding is a contributory factor in this failure, but it is a relatively minor one; that parents also have a part to play in that failure, but their part is anything but minor; and that teachers and schools also contribute to the failure.

We should start by addressing the methods. The Government decided what should be taught when they fixed the national curriculum some years ago. It has settled down nicely although it still needs some fine tuning. We must now focus on how to teach. Teachers and the unions will resist us, but they resisted all our reforms when we introduced them, yet they now accept many of them.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so soon in his speech. If he is so concerned about the quality of teaching and education, can he say why the teaching profession and academics accepted the recommendations of the James report in 1972?

Dr. Spink: I shall come to that point later in my speech.

I want to premise my remarks by praising teachers. The more we do that the better, as the majority of teachers are dedicated, professional and caring people. They are teachers because of the vocation, not because of the vacation. They deserve our praise and recognition for their efforts and their integrity. Head teachers such as John Poskitt of Montgomerie school are dedicated and achieve excellent results. Diane Conway of Hadleigh junior school was given an excellent Ofsted report which praised the enthusiasm, conscientiousness and caring attitude of the staff. It was typical of Ofsted reports on schools in my constituency. I must premise all my remarks by saying that we should thank our teachers for their dedication.

Having said that, let me establish that there is a problem with primary standards. Sadly, it is not difficult to support that assertion. The difficulty is in selecting which evidence to adduce, as there is so much available.

I turn immediately to reading. Last month, my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) said that reading was the essential skill. He was so right. If education is the foundation of Britain's future success and primary education is the foundation of good overall education, reading is the foundation of primary education. This must therefore be the pivotal issue in the debate. Unless and until children acquire proper reading skills, they cannot progress in other subjects.

I take no joy in reporting that many primary schools and primary teachers are failing to teach good reading skills. Regrettably, there is substantial evidence of that phenomenon. The Ofsted report on the teaching of reading includes in its main findings the following comments:

"Good teaching was found in about a quarter of the lessons observed in each year group. Far too many children were found, however, not to be making the progress which they should. The main reason for this is weak teaching."

That could not be a clearer statement. It needs no embroidery or explanation from me. The report related to 45 inner-London primary schools but its implications are far wider and apply generally throughout the country. The problem is national and widespread. Bad reading is now endemic within education.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My hon. Friend said that the problem was endemic. Happily, Lancaster has been exempt from that epidemic because we retained the 11-plus. We still have our grammar schools. Therefore, all the primary schools in my constituency have been obliged to aim for a certain standard. They never went mushy as did schools in the rest of the country. They all retained a high standard in reading and basic skills and they are now where others are seeking to be and they are getting excellent Ofsted reports.

Dr. Spink: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend make that point. Later in my remarks I shall be addressing the part that selection, streaming and setting have to play. In Lancashire, there is a model—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Not in Lancashire.

Dr. Spink: I apologise to my hon. Friend. In Lancaster, there is a model that we should be looking to follow. The selective system also works in Southend and Dorset.

Sadly, last year's national test results for 11-year-olds illustrated the failure of primary schools. They showed that 52 per cent. of children failed to achieve the expected standards at national curriculum level 4 in English. Of more concern, the Basic Skills Agency reported that one third of children who had not learnt to read properly by the age of 10 would never recover from that failure.

The recent Ofsted report found that almost half the schools it covered were not meeting all the requirements that the national curriculum programme of study for reading sets out. That failure should not be tolerated, and

[Dr. Spink]

the fact that it has been is an indictment of local education authorities, schools, teachers and politicians. We should not put up with it; we must do something about it.

The Ofsted report can be a positive mechanism for improving standards in primary education. It exposed poor teaching methods, poor leadership and poor monitoring of teachers' performance by head teachers, and provoked a defensive response from weak head teachers, teachers and self-seeking trade unions. But the report should not be treated negatively, as it could be the catalyst that we need to burst the politically correct cycle of acceptance and tolerance of inexcusably low standards.

Those who are seeking a panacea from nursery education will be disappointed. If schools have children every day for 12 years and still cannot teach 20 or 30 per cent. of them to read and leave 20 or 30 per cent. of them functionally illiterate, then bolting an extra year on the front by nursery education will not solve the problem. It does not need much common sense to understand that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I may be lacking in common sense, but I firmly believe that nursery education is crucial, particularly for children from deprived homes or remote areas. Nursery education is crucial to a child who lives in an isolated farmhouse and who may have no other child to talk to, and he will never lose that advantage.

Dr. Spink: I do not disagree with my hon. Friend, who makes a sound point. But I think that she is missing the point that I am trying to make. If we simply bolt on an extra year of nursery education and continue for the following 12 years to pursue the current child-centred project methods that are failing to teach children to read, write and be numerate, we will not solve the problems. We must change the whole system, as we cannot simply inject quality by one year of nursery education and ignore the rest of the system's failings.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *indicated assent.*

Dr. Spink: I am glad to see that my hon. Friend now agrees.

Having established that there is a problem, I shall address its causes. Funding has a part to play and, as society develops, we should direct a greater proportion of our national wealth towards education and training. However, increasing spending on education does not necessarily result in improved standards, and there is often an inversely proportional relationship between the amount of money spent per pupil and the standards provided. That is the case even in areas that appear to be socially comparable, such as areas within Essex—but I will not embarrass my colleagues by going into detail.

I want to address the distribution of the total available education funding between the phases, as I believe that the primary phase does not get an appropriate share of the overall resources. I have long held that view, and fought on the issue in Dorset in the 1980s and in Essex in the 1990s, where I started a campaign to shift funding towards primary education in 1991. I carried out a Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting statistics analysis and revealed that Essex primary schools were among the worst-funded of the 106 LEAs. A report in the *Yellow Advertiser* on 29 January 1993 said:

"Spink launches new attack on primary school funding.

MP Dr Bob Spink has returned to the attack about the underfunding of local primary schools which results in children of two different year groups being put in the same class . . . Rick Morgan, spokesman for Essex Primary Heads Association, said, 'We are fully behind Bob Spink in his stand to get better funding for Essex primary schools as they are the poor relations compared with other counties, and are also badly off when you see the gap with the funding Essex gives to its secondary schools."

I was delighted to receive the support of Rick Morgan, who helped me in my fight and helped to change society in Essex for the better by forcing Essex to shift funding. His hard work will pay dividends, and he is to be congratulated. A letter on 13 May from Paul Lincoln, the director of education in Essex, illustrates the change that we forced upon the Essex LEA. The letter states:

"the funding of primary schools is a priority for the County Council".

It was not a priority until Rick Morgan, myself and other good people forced the council to make it a priority.

The letter goes on to say:

"the total primary school budget has increased in each year, between 1992/93 and 1996/97 . . . there has however been a significant increase in the number of pupils in primary schools and whilst the expenditure figures . . . indicate a 31 per cent. increase in funding, when compared on a per pupil basis this reduces to 23 per cent."

I am proud to have initiated the move that brought about that change. The figures do not indicate that there has been any starvation of funding from the Government or Essex county council, and I congratulate both of them. However, I insist that they go further.

Emboldened by my success in Essex, I took the matter to the Education Select Committee, of which I was a humble member. I initiated an inquiry by the Committee into the relative funding of the phases and, in July 1996, the Committee published a report entitled "The Disparity in Funding Between Primary and Secondary Schools". There is insufficient time to go into the details of that report, but it was excellent and I recommend it to all my colleagues.

The Government response to the report was published in October, and its conclusion stated:

"The witnesses with secondary school backgrounds regarded the disparity between the phases as being relatively small, but not so small that it could be adjusted without serious disadvantage to secondary schools. Those with primary school backgrounds and most of the neutral witnesses thought that the disparity was too large and should be reduced. We are persuaded that the latter are right."

I was greatly gratified that the Government were persuaded, and the response went on to specify:

"Any real terms increase in funding that becomes available, from either national or local government, for example to fund additional pupils in the system, should be distributed disproportionately (as compared with historic practice) in favour of primary schools. In addition, there should be a small annual shift between the sectors, especially with regard to administrative costs. All primary schools should be enabled to benefit from the latter changes."

I quoted from the conclusion extensively because it is important that the Department for Education and Employment does not forget that commitment.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): As a current member of the Education Select Committee, I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on gaining this debate—thereby raising the priority of the subject—but on what he has achieved in primary school funding. Will he tell us

whether the Government have carried out their intentions? Before he concludes, will he reiterate that there is no point in having vast resources unless one has the right teachers and the right teaching methods? In that respect, I draw the attention of the House to the amazingly interesting "Panorama" programme the other night.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes a number of extremely important points, and I will deal with them in my speech. I also intend to deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) in an intervention at the beginning of my speech. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will address the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) about the progress that the Government have made in shifting funding towards the foundation of primary education. If we get it right there, it will be cheaper to fund the latter stages.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: We must include nurseries.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend continues to ride her own hobby-horse.

It is important to keep changing the balance of funding between the phases of education. It is wrong that, in some instances, we spend double the amount on a 15-year-old that we spend on a six-year-old, because it is more difficult to change the attitude and improve performance of that 15-year-old, whereas it is easy to change the attitude of six-year-olds and to instil in them the discipline and skills that they need. It is essential to build that foundation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is not just the discrepancy between the 11-year-old and the 15-year-old that is of concern but the discrepancy between the nearly 11-year-old and the just turned 11-year-old—that gap is enormous. My hon. Friend may be aware that that discrepancy is bad in Lancashire, but unfortunately discretion lies entirely with the county council. I do not believe that it is possible for the Government to lay down the law unless they can manage to influence dreadful councils such as Lancashire.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes another good point. The report of the Select Committee on Education on disparity in funding considered the jump between year 6 and year 7 and made some recommendations about it. I recommend my hon. Friend to read those recommendations, because she will be gratified to find that her views are supported by the Committee. It is interesting to note that Japan does it the other way round and spends more per pupil on primary children than it does on secondary children. Perhaps that offers a message for us.

It is important to get the foundations right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton said, funding is not the essential problem. I accept that we must address that issue, but it is not the key to resolving the problem of low standards in schools. My hon. Friend has already told us the key to that.

Parents are much more important than funding. A child's outcome in education is critically dependent on his parents' attitude, involvement and motivation. That correlates positively with success, whereas a parent's indifference correlates with failure. I am not aware of any formal research into that problem, which would be difficult to undertake, but I would be pleased to know of some. Common sense dictates that parental involvement is more important than almost anything else.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hear, hear.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend is agreeing with me again—I am grateful.

It is difficult for me to see how politicians can encourage more self-reliance and understanding among parents. Often today's parents are the product of failed socialist progressive methods. They are victims of the politically correct systems and attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s that have hung around for far too long.

Parents have the key responsibility for their children's education. Many do not understand that fact. They have the key responsibility for anything concerning their children. They bring their children into the world and they are responsible for their behaviour, education and even their diet—not us. They think that we are responsible, but we are not. Teachers do not have the key responsibility for children's education, nor do the schools, the LEAs, the Government, the Department for Education, and Employment, or I. Parents have that key responsibility. But it is the fashion to resist accepting responsibility. Today many people try to shift responsibility to the state; they blame it for everything. That does not wash. I do not know how to break that problem, but I know that break it we must. We must promote self-reliance and reject the nanny state. We must reject bigger government in all its forms and seek smaller government.

I have no solution to the problem of promoting parental involvement and responsibility, but we have provided solutions to another key problem of maintaining standards in schools and of teaching. The Government have introduced excellent reforms. We gave control back to schools, governors, parents and took power away from the state and the LEAs. We devolved power to those directly concerned with their children's education. We performed the ultimate act of devolution and democracy, and it worked. The local management of schools gave financial control to every school but Labour resisted it.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): That is not true.

Dr. Spink: The hon. Lady must accept that it is true. The schools resisted it and LEAs resisted it, but not now; they now see that it was right. I remember well when LMS was introduced in Dorset when the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors who sat opposite me resisted it fiercely.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Where are the Liberals?

Dr. Spink: I must tell my hon. Friend that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), the Liberal spokesman on education, is upstairs in Committee. He courteously apologised to me for his absence before the debate, and I respect that. He has a job to do for education in Committee.

[Dr. Spink]

Going grant-maintained gave schools management control. We need many more such schools and we must find the means to increase their number dramatically. GM status means that schools are prised away from the dead hand of extensive bureaucratic—and, too often, politically motivated—LEA control. We imposed the national curriculum, which has set out a clear set of entitlements to skills and knowledge for every child at each key age. We have established a common national set of standards and we have tested and measured achievement against them. We have now ensured that no child need unnecessarily fall behind, because we can now monitor his progress and report it to his parents.

We also set about measuring teaching quality through a system of inspections using registered inspectors. We have published the results so that education has become publicly accountable. We trust parents, employers and communities with the key information about their children's achievement, but Labour does not trust parents and the community with that information. We trust them and we have empowered them, but Labour would take away that power and hand it back to its band of local Labour activists. We know who I and my constituents would prefer to control our children's education.

We have now begun, finally, to tackle the problem of teacher training. With hindsight, that should have been among our first reforms, not our last, which we should have tackled in 1980. The Teacher Training Agency has been established for 18 months. It is still developing its role and working on a clearer statement on teaching skills. It should move fast and it should be starting to flex its muscles to force change, where necessary, in teacher training colleges.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: There again, my constituency is singularly fortunate because our local college, St. Martin's university college, has just been given four excellent ratings on its training. It is quite outstanding, and it makes a difference—that is why we have such a lot of good teachers around our way. Once they come to Lancashire, they do not want to leave. They go to St. Martin's and they are beautifully trained. Those student teachers are doing a wonderful job in the classroom; so, once again, we are singularly fortunate.

Dr. Spink: I read about St. Martin's just last night, and I wondered whether to mention it as an example of good practice that should be repeated elsewhere. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has done that for me.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has said that Labour wants 15,000 bad teachers to be sacked. He makes the time-honoured mistake of attacking the symptoms when he should be attacking the cause. Ineffective teacher training colleges should receive the bulk of our attention.

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): Mr. Woodhead said that 15,000 teachers should be sacked.

Dr. Spink: I agree that the chief inspector said that, but I believe that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield agreed with him.

If certain teacher training colleges fail to improve and to drop their politically correct progressive ideology, the TTA should close them down and their accreditation should be withdrawn. We should start that progress quickly.

It is not enough, however, to tackle the problem of teacher training colleges. Just 20,000 teachers qualify each year, but 400,000 teachers work in our classrooms every day. All of them need to train and improve constantly, as we all do. I welcome the fact that the Government have made available £400 million for in-service training, but we must ensure that that money is used wisely.

I welcome the 13 literacy centres set up by the Government to improve standards. I also welcome the HEADLAMP scheme to support newly-appointed head teachers. The Government have introduced these and other improvements, which are needed because the task of reforming education is desperately difficult as well as important.

It is fashionable to say that teachers suffer from innovation shock and that they should have no more change for a time. I reject that argument. There is some truth in it, but teachers, like the rest of us in the real world, must change. The world is changing fast and moving forward, and if we do not change we shall be left behind, and so will the teachers. They must change or fall behind.

We cannot wait to do what is right. For every year we wait, a year of our children's time is wasted at school because they are not making the progress they should. Young Tommy and young Sophie cannot redo their year 6 at school because the teacher has got it wrong. If the teachers get it wrong, that opportunity is gone for the rest of little Tommy and little Sophie's life, so we cannot delay.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Talking about people being reluctant to change, it was interesting, in "Panorama" on Monday night, to hear a headmistress who had not been in favour of whole-class teaching who then started it and found it such a huge success that she and her staff now advocate it to other schools. It has made a startling difference in that school. That shows that teachers can change if they see the results.

Dr. Spink: I agree with my hon. Friend. She, like me, does not advocate traditional methods only because it is fashionable. I did so in the 1980s, and was ridiculed. I did so in 1991, and was blasted in the local newspapers, before I became a Member of Parliament, as being out of control. I said that teachers used to be one of the top professions, rated alongside doctors, dentists and accountants, but that that was no longer the case because they were not acting as professionals—sitting in Levi jeans and baggy sweaters on the corner of the desk and not teaching the children, allowing the children to learn at their own speed and following child-centred progressive methods. I was ridiculed and laughed at for saying that.

What I now find pretty hard to swallow is hearing Opposition Members, not laughing at me, but pretending to agree with me. But they really are still advocating the socialist ideology that has submerged education in an execrable process of levelling down. That is what socialism is about—levelling down. As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton said, Labour opposed selection, setting, streaming, testing and the publication of results.

Labour betrayed generations of children by its socialist Plowden project-based ideology. We need traditional methods; we need whole-class teaching; we need phonics, which contribute to the accuracy, fluency and confidence of children when they read.

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the history of the Labour party's position on this matter. Perhaps I might be a little more charitable to Labour. Labour Members appreciate that the children of their supporters, who do not necessarily grow up in a family with a reading environment, are being let down by some of these progressive teaching methods and the absence of whole-class teaching. We should welcome the evidence on the "Panorama" programme that some elements of the Labour party, such as Dagenham, which is a Labour-controlled borough—perhaps new Labour—are beginning to see the sense of reform. I imagine—my hon. Friend might like to explore this—that this will open up new divisions in the Labour party between those who realise that modern methods are wrong and those who will resist to the end any attempt to replace them.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend is wrong. There is no such thing as new Labour. It is a con trick. It is a complete and utter fraud on the electorate. I hope that the electorate never have to find it out.

As my hon. Friend says, it is important for children to have books in their homes, so perhaps he would explain—I am sure that no Opposition Member will—why Labour-controlled Essex county council this year cut the library book fund by an unprecedented, massive, disastrous 25 per cent. That will not teach children to read. Labour sends kids down the video shop—that is what Labour is all about.

We need more selection at school and class level. Mixed-ability teaching, which was a socialist levelling-down mechanism, has failed. We have now understood that we should be ruthless in driving it out. It betrays the weaker child as well as the stronger. Labour has not really understood that. It would return to its old ideology and would be the puppet of the unions and the teachers' producers' influence if it ever came to power. It will not, because the country is not so foolish.

Labour tries to give the illusion that it accepts what I am saying, as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton suggested. It claims to have undergone a Damascene conversion on education, as in all sectors, but we should not believe it for a moment. Labour's instincts are still driven by the politics of envy and its education policy can be summed up by the expression "levelling down". That is what Labour is about. Its words are warm, but they are dangerous. Labour would damage your children's education.

Labour claims that class size is very important. It is not. The Office for Standards in Education, with which I agree on this point, found that class size was

"only important for infant pupils."

Its research was based on the evaluation of 200,000 lessons. It was reliable and valid. Ofsted found that the effectiveness of teaching has greater influence on pupils' achievement than class size.

Of course, some unions with vested producer interests do not agree. What is new? Labour wants to destroy choice and diversity. It would scrap our grant-maintained schools and make them revert to the status of foundation schools. It would place them, again, under the dead bureaucratic hand of the local education authority and its political placemen. It would scrap selection—along with child benefit, student grants and so on, but I do not want to stray off the subject.

Even Labour now knows that that would reduce standards. Labour Members show us that they know that because their party leader, their Front-Bench health spokesman and many other Labour Members have taken for themselves the benefits that we provided through choice and diversity. I congratulate them—they were absolutely right to do what they did—but I find their hypocrisy breathtaking. They seek to secure for their children the benefits that they seek to deny to everyone else. That is indefensible.

Labour's policy was best summed up by the Secondary Heads Association, which stated that Labour's recent education policy was

"simplistic . . . bland . . . will not raise standards . . . is poorly thought out . . . uncosted . . . short on ideas . . . lacking in detail . . . an uncomfortable combination of the naive and messianic".

Those words all appear in a Secondary Heads Association publication. I get the feeling that the Secondary Heads Association does not like Labour's education policy. It is right to reject it, because it is a sham.

We need to continue our reforms. We obviously need to improve teacher training, and to do so faster than we appear to be doing at the moment. We need to inform parents and educate them, and to focus them on their prime responsibility for their children's education.

We need to drop the Plowden socialist-based child-centred methods that have devastated education in primary schools for 30 years, and adopt the so-called traditional methods. In doing so, we must bear it in mind that those methods were foist on us by socialist dogma. We need to test and publish all the results that we can, even though I know that the Labour party will resist it. We need to bring forward the concept of value added as soon as possible because, without measurement, we cannot even start to control standards. We must continue to increase the proportion of funding in primary education as opposed to secondary education. We need more discipline in schools to make them happier and more productive places for everyone.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that a test for youngsters soon after they entered primary school would give those in deprived areas a much better chance? I have a particular school in mind, which does an excellent job, but that it is not apparent from the results. If children were tested at five and then again at seven, we could see what the school had added. Often, it is extremely good. I believe that we need another examination.

Dr. Spink: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us what progress has been made towards establishing value added measurements, because they are important. It should be possible for us to provide value added information to parents.

[Dr. Spink]

In my constituency, we need to provide pull as well as push for primary schools. By that I mean that the secondary sector must be enhanced in order to provide incentives for the primary sector. Thereby, for the next few moments, I intend to bring my remarks into order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been in order throughout his speech and I hope that he will stay that way.

Dr. Spink: I give formal notice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that we must be granted a specialist technical school—other constituencies have them and Castle Point does not. We need at least one. We must have a sixth form facility for Canvey Island. I will seek to raise those subjects in the near future if I may.

All schools owe a debt of gratitude to Chris Woodhead, the chief inspector of schools. He has done society a great service by exposing the problems in education and it is typical of the socialists that 50 Labour Members signed an early-day motion calling for his resignation because he blew the whistle. It is the sort of socialist antediluvian, shoot-the-messenger reaction that we have come to expect from Opposition Members.

We need Mr. Woodhead to look at moral education and guidance in schools, particularly primary schools. A good start would be to include in every inspection report—I do not think that it happens now—a section on the school's achievement, in quality as well as quantity, in delivering the statutory acts of collective worship and religious education which must be broadly Christian-based and which many schools are not achieving.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I regret having to mention the hon. Member for Bath in his absence but, as he is unavoidably delayed, I have no alternative. He suggested in a pamphlet that we should abolish religious education in schools as well as the collective act of worship.

Dr. Spink: That is another silly Liberal Democrat policy which ranks alongside legalising cannabis.

I am sure that you will be appalled to learn, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, during a visit to a primary school in my constituency, when I asked why, during the service, they had sung only politically correct hymns about yellow buttercups and had made no reference to traditional hymns, to our saviour Jesus or to Christianity, I was told that they did not like to "indoctrinate" the children. I could not believe what I was hearing. We must ask Chris Woodhead to address that problem.

I do not accept that there is no time for moral guidance in our schools. I accept that there are often practical difficulties getting all the children together in one place at one time. Those difficulties must be addressed within the national curriculum. However, we need to find time to give moral guidance as well as academic skills because an articulate young thug is just as objectionable as a stupid young thug. Time must be made to give meaningful moral guidance, both structured and unstructured, and I hope that teacher training colleges and the inspector will address that.

It is worth listening to businesses and what they have to say because they have a valid stake in our primary schools. For example, the finance director of AssiDomän, Mr. Simon Redman, believes that we need more linguists and engineers. He feels that we could greatly improve our export performance if we could speak foreign languages more fluently, and I agree with him. He believes that the best time to start learning foreign languages is at the age of six or seven, or even earlier, which is when they start on the continent. That is why they are so much better than we are.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am sure that my hon. Friend will rejoice with me at the fact that Ripley St. Thomas school in my constituency has just been made a specialist language centre—one of only two in Lancashire. That is an incentive to all the primary schools in the area to improve their languages.

Dr. Spink: I am delighted to hear once again of progress in my hon. Friend's area. It does not surprise me. I agree that we should find more time for languages.

Mr. Redman also said that we must improve the status of engineering, technology and science. The best place for that is in the primary school. We need to educate primary teachers to understand and value those key wealth-generating professions. Too often, they are put behind the doctors, dentists, accountants and solicitors, and they should not be so denigrated. They are equal, if not superior, professions. Teacher training colleges must address that as well.

As part of their jubilee celebrations, pupils at Montgomerie county infants and junior schools in my constituency are planting a time capsule on Monday 1 July. The special plastic capsule was provided by the European Nature Conservation Council, which has set up a nationwide scheme. [*Interruption.*] I hear my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) say, "Hear, hear," when I mention a European institution. I am surprised to hear him say that, because it made me raise an eyebrow.

In 25 years, 200 buried time capsules throughout Britain, including that planted by the excellent children of Montgomerie county school, will be unearthed. I shall ask the head teacher, John Poskitt, whether a copy of this debate can be buried in the capsule.

I wonder whether, in 25 years' time, when the capsule is dug up, we will have solved all our education problems and be making the right investment in education for the benefit of our children and our society. I truly hope so.

11.47 am

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) has been waffling on for 47 minutes about so-called standards and I must question the content of the end of his speech. He suggested putting a copy of his speech in the time capsule, but it would be better to put the hon. Member in and never mind his speech.

We all desire high standards in education and on occasions we have to listen to Conservative Members attacking Opposition Members as though we do not care about education. That is an insult. In the early part of his speech, the hon. Gentleman said that we could not just throw money at education. That could never be said of the Conservative party, which has done anything but that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's flow, but I must

put on the record again that, as he knows, expenditure per pupil since 1979 has gone up by some 50 per cent. in real terms—a record of which the Labour Government prior to 1979 would have been proud.

Mr. Eastham: Later, when I have developed my remarks, I will take the Under-Secretary of State to task about the so-called big expenditure by the Conservative Government.

Standards are not just about examination results. We need good standards for school buildings and to provide the right equipment for children's education. Month after month, we experience Conservative Members talking about standards and about examination results. They never talk about standards for children who are handicapped or children whose first language is not English. They talk about the top few. It is a fact of life that some schools will never get into the examination charts, but nevertheless a good job is being done in those schools by the teaching profession.

Outrageous attacks have often been made on teachers, and we heard some more today. It is no wonder that teachers become demoralised when they have to suffer the sort of attacks that we heard in the previous speech. The teachers can do little about those attacks because they cannot stand up in the Chamber and take hon. Members to task. The teachers depend on some of us, who are not educationists but are interested in a fair deal for the teaching profession and for the kids in schools.

If the hon. Member for Castle Point does not know, I can tell him that teaching is often seriously under-resourced. I remember the Education Reform Act 1988, because I was on the Committee that considered it. Months after the Act came into force, schools still did not have the books and materials that they needed to fulfil their obligations under the Act. That was not the teachers' or the children's fault: it was the fault of under-resourcing by the Government.

When we talk about schools and achievement, we should consider every aspect of education provision, including learning conditions. Many schools, not just in my city of Manchester but in many other cities, are in such a poor state that if they had been in industry the Health and Safety Executive would probably have closed them down. Some of the schools should be condemned.

The Under-Secretary would be disappointed if I did not take up the points that he made and I will give the House some examples of the situation in many schools in Manchester. Many other authorities have the same problems, but I have more details about Manchester. We have had 17 continuous years of a so-called caring Conservative Government who supposedly give education a high priority. When I went to see the Under-Secretary of State last year with the chief education officer and some politicians to present the case for some realistic funding, the hon. Gentleman claimed to have spent more money. But many cities have not smelled much of that money in their authorities. Expenditure has often been weighted towards well heeled and better-off authorities and the direction of funds has been jaundiced.

Instead of waffling, I wish to comment on the situation as it really is. I do not want to make a pretty speech for 45 minutes but actually say nothing. I was so concerned about the schools in Manchester that I wrote to the Health and Safety Executive last year. The Minister claimed that expenditure had increased, but the HSE's letter to me stated:

"Inspectors in this Area have become involved on a number of occasions when parents, teachers or governors complaints have been received concerning structural, electrical and other safety aspects of school buildings. To date we have not found it necessary to take enforcement action since the Local Authority and governors have been aware of the problem and willing to take appropriate action, mindful of their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act to ensure the safety of staff, pupils and visitors to school premises. In general structural safety matters are the clear responsibility of the Local Authority.

In the event of our finding a dangerous situation and the Authority or governing body not being willing to take appropriate action, the use of enforcement notices would be considered. It is not possible to enforce remedial work to a dangerous part of a building as the employer has the option of taking other equally effective measures to ensure safety which may include preventing access to any unsafe part of a school. This has happened in a number of cases in Greater Manchester.

The Director of Education has been made aware of our concern in correspondence following visits to several schools by inspectors."

Rightly, safety is the responsibility of the local authority and if the authority does not take some action, the HSE will issue an enforcement notice to close the school. The action that local authorities have had to take is to put kids in buses for a 20-minute ride to other schools. The authorities have never had the money to deal with problems—for example, to make the school windows watertight—when the HSE drew problems to their attention.

I have a report from last year, entitled "Expenditure on Education Premises and Equipment in Manchester—Some Facts and Figures", in which the Under-Secretary may be interested. If he wants to make a note of the figures, I will give him a chance to get his pencil out. The report states:

"Estimated annual requirement to improve and maintain buildings: £50 million.

DFE allocation 1994-95: £12.9 million".

The authority needed £50 million, but the allocation was £12.9 million. The Department for Education and Employment also put a cap on spending so that the local authority could even not spend that amount. It spent only £5 million. The report continues:

"Estimated expenditure needed over next 4-5 years to bring schools and other establishments up to a satisfactory standard: £500 million."

We have a legacy of an accumulating need for spending. Year after year, there have been cuts in funding and allocations. After 17 years of continual cuts, a massive problem has built up. I worry about where the next Labour Government will get the hundreds of millions of pounds needed to cope with the neglect by the Conservative Government.

I have another report, entitled "Manchester's Crumbling Schools", although I emphasise again that the problem does not affect only Manchester. It gives some basic facts about the standards in schools. It states:

"The estimated value of Manchester's school buildings and associated furniture and equipment is £630 million. Over the last few years the Government has approved less than £1 million each year for general repairs and improvements . . . To bring schools up to a satisfactory standard £500 million needs to be spent".

[Mr. Eastham]

Another part of the report itemises some of the defects, because it is not always a case of putting a new roof on a building—although, God knows, we need plenty of those. The report states:

> "In many schools substantial items of engineering equipment and installations, such as heating systems (boilers), electrical wiring and fire alarms have exceeded their economic and/or serviceable life span of 15 to 20 years and need to be replaced as part of an on-going programme. The Department of Education and Science (DES) Building Bulletin No. 70 (1990) states that the economic life of commercial boilers is between 15 and 20 years."

Some of the boilers are listed; the report states that 61 schools have boilers that are more than 25 years old and that some of them are more than 40 years old. They are in Victorian buildings. There are 40 schools with boilers aged between 20 and 25 years, and 291 boilers require to be replaced. In winter, when it is snowing or raining, everybody in the school may be freezing because the boiler is not working. Hon. Members smile, but that is hardly a good way to raise standards. Would it put kids in a good condition to improve their reading and writing? Would it be good for the teachers to be freezing in the corner? Do you think that standards should include such matters?

Dr. Spink *rose—*

Mr. Eastham: If you want to intervene, I will gladly give way.

Dr. Spink: Of course we must look after the fabric of our schools. Would the hon. Gentleman care to predict whether his Front-Bench spokesman will promise to spend extra money on education above the amount that we are spending?

Mr. Eastham: I promise that we will make a better job than your Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the convention that all remarks are addressed through the Chair.

Mr. Eastham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, but sometimes hon. Members make such silly asides that one becomes outraged.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is why remarks are addressed through the Chair.

Mr. Eastham: I do not think that the hon. Member for Castle Point intervened through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. He intervened directly on me. The convention should work for hon. Members in all parts of the House and not just for Opposition Members.

If you want to improve standards—and you keep on professing that you do—you have to put your money where your mouth is and start spending on schools. You have to give them good working conditions. Some schools in Manchester are Portakabins with holes in the walls. They have no heating and are rat infested and you are doing nothing about it. It cannot be said that it is up to a Labour Government because Labour is in opposition. For God's sake, the Government have been in power for 17 years. *[Interruption.]* The Minister makes a seated intervention which, of course, was missed by the Deputy Speaker. It was directed to me.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not aware of missing any intervention.

Mr. Eastham: In that case it looks as though you have condoned the Minister speaking to me. Perhaps it is all right to make such remarks, but on our side we cannot make them.

The Minister's little aside was about LEAs, but where do the Government come into these matters? What is their part in the formula? Are they not responsible for spending taxpayers' money on education in the cities? What are you collecting taxes for if you do not disburse money in the interests of education? The hon. Member for Castle Point spoke about the high priority of education. We are paying a great deal of tax, and a fair proportion of that ought to be directed to education.

When I met the Minister, he was very kind and he finally sent me a letter which stated that the Government had finally agreed that two schools would have some assistance. There was £233,000 to Manchester local education authority in recognition of its education capital expenditure needs in 1995-96. As I have said, we need £50 million a year and we have a growing problem that requires £500 million, but that is the sort of response that we got. We are grateful for it, because it will affect two schools, but we have 250 schools.

No one should think that standards can be improved by demoralising teachers by saying that they are not up to it. I accept that one or two teachers may not be up to it, but one or two hon. Members are not up to it either. The teaching profession, like the House, covers a broad spectrum. There are some incompetent hon. Members and some have sleaze as part of their upbringing in this place; hon. Members are a cross-section of the population, and the same applies to teachers. I am not defending anybody who is not up to the job. Nevertheless, if we want to improve standards for schoolchildren, we must make provision for them. That means providing decent, warm, watertight schools with good teachers and support from the Government instead of constant attacks.

12.6 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I apologise for not being here for the start of the debate. I hope that the Whip will note that I was listening to proceedings in the Select Committee on Defence. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) for not hearing his opening remarks, but I got the flavour of his speech and thoroughly enjoyed it.

In the four minutes remaining to me, I should like to reflect on the two main Opposition parties. I became a Member of Parliament at precisely the same time as the leaders of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. I stand by exactly those matters on which I was elected in 1983, but those two party leaders seem to have changed their views on a range of issues.

There is some irony in my personal circumstances in that my family's education was attacked by both the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. The attack was led by a former Labour Member, Mr. Arthur Latham, who for a time was the leader of Havering council, which is the

council that the Minister is under. I was criticised for sending our eldest child to a non-selective, non-grant-maintained, single-sex school. There are none in Basildon—the school was outside my constituency—and the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties behaved disgracefully. The House can imagine my disgust when some months later I learned precisely what the two leaders of the Opposition parties were up to. Last Thursday, the Labour and Liberal Democrat alliance lost control of Havering council.

Last year I visited every primary school in my constituency and we ended with a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I was proud of the way in which all my head teachers conducted their discussions with the Secretary of State. We shared views on many issues. There are many single parents in my constituency, and when we debate standards in education it is quite wrong for any hon. Member to expect schools to bring up our children for us. I take my hat off to those parents who, for various reasons, are on their own and struggling against all the odds.

I suppose that all Members of Parliament draw on their own circumstances. My education started four decades ago, in the London borough of Newham, and I shall reflect on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham). All the classes were of 50 or more, in poor Victorian buildings. As an individual, I owe everything to my teachers, and salute them for their efforts, as we could spell properly, write clearly and could certainly command the rudiments of basic arithmetic. I am not sure what conclusions I would draw from that. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point mentioned languages. That is fine, but I hope that our children can master English first, as occasionally there is an over-emphasis on computers.

I was a councillor in Redbridge, which has high standards in education. I aspire to stand as a candidate in the Southend, West constituency in the next election. I have visited every school in Southend, West over the past year, where the circumstances are rather different. In Southend, we have selective education and our young people take 11-plus examinations. In the time leading up to the general election, I shall want to know where the candidates who will stand against me stand on the important issues of selection in the borough of Southend. Southend, West has the largest primary school in Essex, Westborough, with 680 children. There is a real funding problem to be addressed, but I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the debate, which has been thoroughly worth while.

12.11 pm

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on securing the debate, since when—I am sure that it is just a coincidence—the newspapers have been full of primary education matters.

I agreed with the hon. Gentleman on one point, but my enthusiasm for his speech ran out thereafter. He said that we have not given primary education the priority that it deserves in recent decades. I whole-heartedly agree. The blame lies not only with the Tory Government but with past Labour Governments and councils. It is an error that everybody has made. We say that the years spent in primary education are important, and we know that unless we get it right at five, six and seven, it will be much more difficult to get it right at 11, 12 and 13. Despite that, we consider it unacceptable for sixth-form classes to have more than 15 students, when children are well motivated, yet it is tolerable, apparently, to have classes of more than 30 at age five and six.

Historically, the teachers with the best qualifications were always guided into secondary education. The Government must act on the recent work carried out by the Select Committee into the disparity in funding between secondary and primary education. As a former secondary school teacher, I know that everybody in education, no matter in what area their interest lies, accepts that primary education has been the Cinderella part of the service, and it is high time it secured the resources to which it is entitled.

I agree with the hon. Member for Castle Point that there is much good going on in primary schools. For many children, it is the point in their lives when their love of learning is born, when anything that they achieve thereafter can be traced back to a good relationship or experience in a reception class. All of us know the precious enthusiasm that a child has when he or she starts school. Some of us are saddened and wonder where it has gone by the time they start secondary school, but to have the task of nurturing it and ensuring that it grows into a love of learning and to ambition and high aspiration is one of the joys for those who choose to spend their teaching career in primary education. To the teachers who get it right and thus give the children a good start in life as a result we owe a debt of gratitude as a nation.

Having said that, it would be silly to have a debate on primary education and not express concern about some of the real problems in that sector. The evidence that we are falling behind is overwhelming, from reports from the Office of Standards in Education, from international studies and from the Basic Skills Agency, which reports that one third of inner-city children are starting secondary education with a reading age at least two years behind their chronological age. What worries me most is that the gap between those who do well and those who do not is wider in this country than anywhere else. It is growing. Even the Prime Minister made mention of it, as recently as two years ago. We must address that problem. The crusade and the challenge is to bridge the gap so that everybody can have a chance to do well.

That is where I parted company with the hon. Gentleman for Castle Point, because the rest of his speech seemed to fall into the old Tory trap of saying that it was everybody else's fault except theirs. He said that it was the fault of parents for not taking responsibility, that it was the fault of socialists, labour councillors, the Teacher Training Agency, and information technology—all and sundry, but it was not the fault of his Government. I do not know why a party seeks power other than to try to achieve change and to do the things that it wants to do. The corollary is that, at the end of their period in power, the Government are judged by what happens.

The Government must be judged by what has happened in primary education, because they have played their part in that process. The national curriculum was introduced, withdrawn, introduced again, withdrawn again and then reimposed. Testing was introduced, taken out, introduced again, then changed, then delayed, taken out and introduced again. It has been chaos and disaster. During the debate in the Tory party about what knowledge is

[Ms Estelle Morris]

acceptable in the national curriculum—whether it should be testing this or testing that—teachers were trying to teach and pupils were trying to learn, with constant stops and changes to the curriculum and changes to the way in which they should be assessed. That is not the stability that everybody needs, particularly those in primary education, if they are to do well.

Also under the Conservative Government, class sizes have risen. Figures announced last week show that 40 per cent. of our children at primary level are now in classes of more than 30, and more than 17,000 are in classes of more than 40.

Mr. Robin Squire *rose—*

Ms Morris: The Minister will excuse me if I do not give way, as the opening speech went on for 48 minutes, which limits any interventions.

There has been no systematic attempt at research into teaching strategies that will work. We have moved from shock report to shock report. At every stage, the Government have announced, in the words of Lord Henley last month, a number of additional measures. It is more than that. It is about sustained research and planned work into building on good practice, seeing what goes right, spreading that information to other schools and ensuring that they have an opportunity to do that as well.

I can see the problem arising again with Conservative Members who have talked about the "Panorama" programme, which I saw, too. It was absolutely fascinating, and there is much that we can learn, but if Conservative Members think that what we saw in the programme, in Dagenham or abroad, is a return to something that existed pre-Plowden, they are badly wrong.

In class teaching pre-Plowden, children were not engaged in conversation and answering questions. Teachers did not interact with children in that manner. They did not involve. They told children what to do and the children sat quietly. What we saw on "Panorama" was a very exciting strategy. It took the best of the whole-class approach, in which it is easier to monitor children, but involved children in the learning at every single stage. That is the excitement of it.

If Conservative Members think that it was moving backwards, they will make a mess of it, as they have of so much in the past 17 years. It was new and it was exciting. The next Labour Government will build on that by making the research that exists in bucketloads in education institutions and local authorities available to all teachers, so they can develop improved teaching and learning systematically—not in a dogmatic way or to fight their own political corners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) was right to stress the need for good school buildings. I was a pupil in a Manchester school when my hon. Friend was a member of Manchester city's education committee. The physical surroundings in which I was educated did credit to that Labour administration, working in conjunction with a Labour Government. I did not experience the surroundings that my hon. Friend described as existing in Manchester today.

I think sometimes that Conservative Governments seek power as a platform to criticise others. Labour seeks power as a platform to work with others, to raise educational standards for all our children. We will reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to no more than 30 pupils. We will build on things that the Government got right—reading recovery and section 11 funding for ethnic minorities—but have chosen to withdraw. We will make good research evidence available, and we will ensure for the first time in 17 years that all the essential partners in the education service—central Government, local government, schools, teachers, parents and governors—are united on a common agenda and speak a common language, to make certain that children in primary education get the best possible start by learning the basics, mastering information technology and having a well ordered learning environment.

That cannot be achieved in the fragmented and divisive way in which the Government have been behaving. The next Labour Government will at long last ensure the partnership that will accomplish the task that every parent in this country wants completed.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): Having given a little time to others, I hope that the House will understand if, unusually, I do not give way to interventions—as I normally do. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on securing this important debate, and I am grateful to him for providing the opportunity to discuss primary education.

I am sure that it was a slip of the tongue on the part of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) when she said that above 40 per cent. of classes number more than 30 pupils. I dare say that she meant to say that the figure is 29 per cent. I believe that the hon. Lady was including classes of 30 pupils, which account for a significant proportion of all classes. The figure of 29 per cent. is less than that for 1979, and the number of classes of more than 35 pupils has halved by comparison with 1979.

I completely challenge the assertion of the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) that resources are at the heart of standards. The hon. Gentleman will have read, as I have, many independent reports on schools. Few of them highlight resources, but emphasise instead that good teaching delivers good education, while highlighting how resources are applied. I urge the hon. Gentleman not to be confused by resources. Overwhelmingly, attitudes and teaching style are at the heart of quality teaching.

As to buildings, the figures show that the capital resources made available to schools this year of £700 million are 7 per cent. more than last year. The hon. Gentleman would struggle, as I would, to find another budget area that has increased by that amount year on year. Councils should regard schools as being as important as council offices, town halls and all the other public buildings in their ownership. It is no use councils saying that the condition of their schools is all the fault of Government—they have a responsibility in law and common sense to maintain in good order all the buildings in their ownership.

Primary schools have increasingly come under the spotlight in recent years, and rightly so. There has been speculation about standards, how teachers are teaching

and how much children are learning. I welcome that attention. The effects of a child's first few years in school can stay with him or her their whole education and beyond. The child who leaves primary school reading with confidence, and with basic self-discipline and powers of concentration, is equipped to tackle the academic challenges of secondary school and the wider challenges of adolescence. The child who has only a hazy appreciation of numeracy and who cannot work without close supervision will find secondary school and life beyond the classroom that much harder.

We have done much to ensure that primary education meets pupil needs. We introduced the national curriculum and associated assessment, so that for the first time—thanks to a Conservative Government—parents have a guarantee that their children will be taught the most important subjects and tested on what they have been taught. We have taken steps to find out exactly what is going on in schools. By the end of this term, Ofsted will have inspected nearly 7,000 of our 19,000 primary schools, which is no mean achievement. Primary inspections only started in September 1994. Before then, the average primary school could expect to wait 200 years for the inspectors to come calling.

Ofsted inspections and national curriculum assessment are providing the first ever comprehensive audit of teaching and learning in primary schools, so the debate about standards can move from assertion and speculation to proper consideration of the facts. Inspection and assessment reveal a wide range of achievements. At one end of the spectrum are outstanding primary schools, including those identified in the annual report of Her Majesty's chief inspector. Those schools, some in extremely deprived areas, achieve high standards and provide their pupils with the best possible start to school life. At the other end of the spectrum, some 90 primary schools have been judged to be failing their pupils. The majority of schools fall between those extremes—they have some good features but also room for improvement.

Last year's national curriculum assessment results for 11-year-olds were disappointing. The Government are taking action to tackle particular problems and to raise overall standards. Where schools fail, the special measures regime comes into play. Primary schools respond well. They generally improve more quickly and need less time on special measures than secondary schools. We will publish primary school performance tables reporting this year's assessment results for 11-year-olds. Parents want and are entitled to that information. The chief inspector has pointed out before that tests and the publication of performance tables are helping to raise standards.

We are funding 23 local education authorities to run projects in primary school improvement. Performance measurement and target setting have been used to great effect in secondary schools, and we want to help primary schools the same way. We will extend the assisted places scheme so that gifted children of primary school age can benefit from the scheme's advantages.

Each of those initiatives and more will help to raise standards, but what matters most is the quality of teaching that children receive each day. Good teachers—and there are many of them—use effective methods to get results. That is as true in the most deprived inner-city area as it is in the leafiest shire school. The Government are determined that all teachers should know what works in the classroom and what does not. We know that children need to be taught—that they do not learn simply by exploration and investigation. The same applies to student teachers, who deserve to be properly prepared to take charge of the classroom.

We have tightened the requirements for teacher training to make courses more practical and relevant. From September, all primary teacher training courses will include at least 150 hours each of English, mathematics and science. At least 50 hours will concentrate on the teaching of reading and 50 on the teaching of arithmetic.

We have given Her Majesty's inspectorate the right to inspect training courses. Those inspections will reveal whether the 68 colleges that train primary teachers are using their time well or whether they are using discredited teaching methods. Reports on colleges are being published so that schools and students will know whether a course is up to scratch.

We are not neglecting teachers already in schools. We have started where it matters most—with the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools. As the House knows, we have initiated 25 literacy and numeracy centres. We have, however, some way to go. I noted from *The Daily Telegraph* of Monday the comments—I know not whether they are accurate—of Mr. Colin Richards, formerly of the Office for Standards in Education. In criticising the chief inspector, he regretted that the chief inspector

"sees primary education as essentially concerned with teaching children to read, to write, to calculate, to distinguish between right and wrong and behave in a sort of disciplined, responsible way".

I should be delighted if all our schools were doing that.

Architects (Insurance)

12.30 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am pleased to have secured parliamentary time to debate compulsory indemnity insurance for chartered architects and architects generally, which is of considerable importance. The unfortunate set of circumstances that befell my constituents Mr. Gareth Jones and Mrs. June Jones have repercussions for thousands of people throughout Great Britain. I wish to make it plain that I have nothing but the highest regard for architects as a profession, and I know that their professional standards are among the highest in the world. It is, however, the exception that frequently proves the rule.

In 1989, Mr. and Mrs. Jones purchased a parcel of land for the purpose of erecting a dwelling house—their home. They had saved assiduously to build their dream home in the village of Penmachno near Betws-y-coed in my constituency. It was Gareth Jones's home village, and he had spent many a long year working throughout the United Kingdom and beyond to secure enough capital to purchase their dream home.

In 1990, Mr. and Mrs. Jones began making plans in earnest, and, of course, they had to consider who was going to prepare the plans. Mr. Jones had offers from part-time building consultants and architectural drawers who would prepare all the plans, submit them for planning approval and allow for inspection at a cost of less than £500.

Being mindful of the fact that this was probably the greatest financial commitment that he would enter into, Mr. Jones decided that he should instruct a chartered architect to have added security if "something should go wrong." So it was that my constituent reasonably opted for the services of a chartered architect, despite a fourfold increase in fees. Mr. Jones was happy to pay the extra in view of the transaction's importance to him and to his family.

Mr. Jones consulted a chartered architect, Mr. D. J. Broomfield, RIBA, who practised at Colwyn Bay, Clwyd. Plans were drawn up, submitted to the borough council and approved. Mr. and Mrs. Jones paid Mr. Broomfield £2,000 to include the necessary inspection fees and supervision, which would lead to an architect's certificate. There were mistakes in the plans that were never communicated to Mr. and Mrs. Jones, but, in any event, the building work was commenced in earnest and my constituents were happy to see their dream home taking shape.

Unbeknown to them, however, the local planning authority and building control officer served a rejection notice on Mr. Broomfield, referring to no fewer than 17 problems with the property. Among the problems were water ingress through the gable end, the porch, severe cracking in the plasterwork and inadequate drainage around the property—all substantial items. It transpired that Aberconwy council had written to Mr. Broomfield about all those items, but he must have concealed the letters, and never uttered a word to the builder or to my constituents.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones then found that they were not able to communicate with the architect. Calls went unanswered and letters unacknowledged. Unbeknown to them, Mr. Broomfield was undergoing personal problems, culminating in his taking his own life in January 1993.

The following is a brief list of problems at the property. There was considerable rising and penetrating damp. There were problems on the chimney to the lounge involving the cavity tray. There was an absence of apron flashing. A chimney stack on an outer cavity wall was wrong. The outer leaf and the cavity were wrong. There was evidence of dampness at the reveals, again probably a damp course problem. Window openings had not been completed, and all were lacking a suitable cill to throw water away from the walls. The mastic pointing to the frames had not been carried out.

The porch showed signs of extensive penetrating and rising damp. The damp-proof membrane did not tie into the damp course, which appeared to be below the floor level. The stepped flashing was cemented to the wall, and it was not possible to determine whether a cavity tray was incorporated. There was a lack of gutters. Hairline cracks had appeared in the render, and trussed rafters required additional bracing to conform to British standard 5268. Background ventilation was required to habitable rooms. Mechanical ventilation was required in the kitchen. The ground floor was not insulated, and storm water drainage had not been installed.

Therefore, through no fault of their own, my constituents are in a ruinous position. They have an uninhabitable house with a substantial mortgage and a repair bill in excess of £30,000, which they do not have and which they have no prospect of obtaining. Initially, they wrote to the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom, which said merely that the deceased Mr. Broomfield had been registered by it, under the Architects (Registration) Acts 1931 to 1969, until his death on 8 January 1993. It suggested that Mr. and Mrs. Jones consult a solicitor to find out inter alia whether Mr. Broomfield had professional indemnity insurance, and to consider taking proceedings against the deceased's estate—not a straightforward action. According to my constituents, in any event, the estate was almost insolvent.

I was consulted, and I wrote to the Royal Institute of British Architects about professional indemnity insurance. I was told to contact the widow and ask whether any insurance existed. I then met RIBA's chief executive to register my view that compulsory PII should be introduced urgently. May I draw a comparison with the legal profession? No solicitor is entitled to practise without proof of PII having been paid. As a solicitor, I think that that is both right and proper—I have no hesitation about it. It is costly, but clients are protected and so are lawyers.

With the best will in the world, however, things sometimes go wrong, especially under extreme pressure of work. By the very nature of their work, architects have a higher potential to inflict problems on clients. It is astonishing that a highly regarded body such as the RIBA does not insist on it. I always thought it did. The Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom does not insist on it and, since taking up this case, I have had numerous letters from architects, some RIBA members and others not. Nearly all support my contention, with the reservation that all people engaged in drawing plans for remuneration should be covered by insurance.

On 24 May, the chief executive of the British Institute of Architectural Technologists wrote to me saying:

"In the front page article in Building Design of 26th April we were interested to read your comments on the question of compulsory professional indemnity insurance for Architects. As a professional institute in the construction industry we have already introduced mandatory PII for all members who provide services direct to clients. I enclose a copy of our Code of Conduct.

We spent a long time discussing the introduction of mandatory PII but considered that the risk of losing some members who were not prepared to carry professional indemnity insurance was outweighed by the public's perception of Architectural Technologists and what our professional Institute was trying to achieve. We therefore support your view in pushing for compulsory PII for Architects."

I have received another letter from the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. It said:

"Since May 1992 the Incorporation has placed obligations on its membership generally to carry PI insurance when they are responsible for businesses; although the wording of the obligation is flexible enough to permit those responsible for public sector businesses to provide appropriate indemnity by some other means.

It is important to bear in mind that the provision of appropriate forms of insurance is an important factor in realising this obligation, and RIAS Insurance Services has for the past few years provided a range of PI policies to suit small part-time businesses up to major international practice requirements.

We believe such obligations are a part of a professional approach, and could form a model for others.

However, the provision of PI insurance is not a long-term solution since it runs on a claims-made basis—and the demise of the architectural business, or the death of the architect can therefore leave future clients vulnerable.

The only solution to that sort of problem is to have a project based or building based insurance—a matter which the profession has supported since the publication of the BUILD (Building Users Insurance against Latent Defects)."

Although I am aware of the Government's dogmatic objections to regulation, I am also keenly aware of the Government's duty to protect consumers. For most people, such a project is the single largest and most important contract of their entire lives, and they deserve security.

The Minister will know that, in 1993, the Warne inquiry's terms of reference included the following: the need to ensure health and safety and the protection of the environment; the need to safeguard the interests of the consumer of architectural services; and the importance of maintaining professional standards. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, which is currently before the House, is just the vehicle for change to ensure that consumers' interests are protected. Of course, the architectural profession has agreed to lay members serving on its professional body. If we are to strengthen protection for the public, this matter is a core issue that needs to be examined.

While looking at the format and purpose of the Architectural Registration Council for the United Kingdom, I discovered that it has not even touched upon the subject. I find that most disturbing. There is a need to ensure that all people engaged in drawing plans for remuneration should be insured. As I have said, I am not singling out the architectural profession. It has been suggested to me by one correspondent that a BUILD-type insurance protecting both the consumer and the provider should be introduced. I am certainly not averse to that.

Another correspondent, a member of the RIBA, states in his letter:

"I am writing to you to lend my support, in principle, to your call for all architects to hold PII . . . I believe architects have a moral duty, if not a professional duty to be insured, but I am concerned that you appear to single out architects without addressing the problem of 'plan drawers' of all descriptions.

Thousands of Building Regulation and Planning Applications are processed every week, which do not bear the designer's signature, mostly from the Black Economy within the Construction Industry and related professions. They are a time-bomb waiting to go off! These individuals are not insured and they certainly do not declare their earnings to the Inland Revenue, which is why they don't sign their work, and when things go wrong they can't be sued.

The way forward, in the interests of fairness, must surely be to insist that all applications placed before a Local Authority bear the name and qualifications of the designer and that all designers show proof of being insured, or, better still, why not promote the idea of single-project insurance cover which protects clients, contractors and designers alike—A LICENCE TO BUILD. Singling out architects for special treatment does not address the problem."

I agree with that statement and, indeed, fully endorse all the comments of that professional gentleman.

We now have at least two solutions—which I find attractive—that could deal with the problem and that would enable people to have security, so preventing a recurrence of the awful calamity that befell by my constituents. I call upon the Minister to give an undertaking that he will urgently consider those solutions and incorporate them in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill.

Mr. and Mrs. Gareth Jones are being sued for possession by their building society. They face ruination. I am sure that many other people throughout the United Kingdom are in a similar position. I sincerely believe that the Government owe them a duty as consumers, and I trust that the Government will not shrink from that responsibility.

The House has heard the views of the profession and the public. The RIBA has begun to move in the right direction since this case has been highlighted. I understand that a professional indemnity insurance policy, tailored for small practices and sole practitioners, has recently been launched by the RIBA insurance agency. As I have said, the RIBA is moving in the right direction, and the Government must now be invited to move in a similar direction. The situation is a calamity for those people caught up in it. This debate may not assist my constituents, but they have been most helpful in the preparation of notes for the debate, because they do not want others to suffer what befell them and have little or no redress.

I ask—indeed, plead with—the Government to move in the right direction. Failure to do so would be an abrogation of duty to our electors, many thousands of whom, through no fault of their own, have been caught in this awful trap.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) has eloquently told us of a tragic sequence of events, with a number of tragic aspects, involving his constituents Mr. and Mrs. Jones, who have been the losers. I am sure that hon. Members will wish to join me in expressing great sympathy to them in the predicament in which they find themselves.

[Mr. James Clappison]

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that there may be some legal consequences of the case, so I do not want to go into too much of the detail. However, I shall certainly respond to the issues that he raised. I note what he said about compulsory professional indemnity insurance for architects. I hope that I can give him some reassurance, but I have to make it clear at the outset that I do not agree that compulsory professional indemnity insurance for architects is the answer.

This case illustrates the sort of problems that can arise when things go wrong with what should be a straightforward project. Fortunately, that does not often happen, but when it does, the problems could be the result of actions, or lack of actions, by any one of a number of people involved in the building process. It is not limited to architects. Any argument in favour of compulsory professional indemnity insurance would apply equally to a number of other trades or professions—builders, for example—who design buildings or supervise building operations. Indeed, it applies to anyone who wishes to design a building on a commercial basis.

The function of building design is not and cannot be protected by law, although the ability to use the title "architect" is so protected. I see no reason for architects alone to be singled out and compelled to have professional indemnity insurance. It would be unfair for architects to be forced to bear the cost of such insurance regardless of their circumstances—for example, they might not be currently practising—and not to impose the same conditions on other building designers. It would also be unfair to potential clients, who would not automatically have that additional protection if they chose someone other than an architect to design their building.

The hon. Gentleman drew some comparisons. I accept that some professions—doctors and lawyers, for example—do have compulsory professional indemnity insurance. I do not consider that necessary or desirable in the construction industry. The Government are opposed to most compulsory insurance as a matter of principle, because of the way it affects the operation of the market.

Perhaps the overwhelming flaw in any compulsory regime is that insurers cannot be compelled to provide cover. In extreme cases, that could even drive professionals out of business. It may also put insurance companies under strong moral pressure to provide insurance, even in cases where acceptance is not commercially sound. While there are some instances—for example, motor and employers liability insurance—where there are overwhelming reasons for a compulsory regime, I do not believe that the same considerations apply in this case.

Compulsory insurance can also cause difficulty for policyholders and insurers. Requiring certain sectors to purchase insurance can weaken their power to negotiate acceptable policy conditions and premium rates. Furthermore, the costs of compulsory insurance could fall more heavily on new entrants and on those who lack a track record, and may therefore add to barriers to entry to the industry.

In raising this issue, the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy aims to protect the client in a building project from the results of bad workmanship and design. I certainly support that aim.

Regardless of the insurance position, all clients already have the additional protection of the building regulations. All builders are required by law to build in compliance with those regulations. They are designed to ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings, and are enforced through regular inspections at all stages of the building process.

Let us consider the issue of legal remedies. Generally speaking—without going into specific cases, for the reasons that I have mentioned—legal remedies are available if things go wrong, and failure to honour a contract can be pursued through the courts. Under statute law, the Defective Premises Act 1972 is particularly important because it requires that work is done in a workmanlike or professional manner and with proper materials, so that, as regards that work, the dwelling will be fit for habitation when completed.

The main problem with legal remedies, of course, is the ability of the person who is found responsible to pay to put things right. That is not a new or uncommon issue. The Government have considered carefully possible ways of dealing with defects that come to light after a building has been completed.

In his report "Constructing the Team", Sir Michael Latham considered options for reform of the law of liability for building defects. Among the options was a change in the law to amend the principle of joint and several liability, to liability in proportion to the amount of blame assigned to each offending party. That was considered specifically because of the way in which the cost of restitution of building defects tends to fall on architects.

The Government have since referred the matter of liability to the Law Commission, which recently reported that there should be no change in the joint and several liability regime. The Government are now consulting on its recommendations.

Sir Michael Latham's report also recommended the introduction of compulsory latent defects insurance. He applied that recommendation specifically to commercial, retail and industrial buildings and not to domestic work. However, his view was that, if compulsory insurance was not introduced, the construction industry has a ready method of introducing an insurance-backed warranty regime through the terms of construction contracts. The Government endorse that approach.

The same view is reflected in our response to the Justice report on how to improve the legal rights and practical remedies available to an owner, tenant or occupier of residential premises on which building work has been carried out defectively. One of the report's recommendations was the establishment of insurance-backed warranty schemes, endorsed by lending bodies and backed by legislation.

The Government would welcome such schemes if they were voluntary, but we would find it difficult to accept that particular proposal, because it is based on a statutory scheme. We would prefer trade associations and other organisations in the construction industry to extend existing schemes for improving the quality of building work and protecting the householder against defective building work. As I am sure the hon. Member will be aware, the most notable of those organisations is the excellent National House Building Council guarantee scheme, which now covers about 90 per cent. of new homes.

The Government regard the extension of voluntary schemes to insure buildings against defects and to provide professional indemnity cover as the best way forward.

Most architects are currently covered by some form of professional indemnity insurance. Those in big practices are covered by their employers' insurance, and the same is true of the many architects who are employed by local authorities and elsewhere in the public sector. Academic or non-practising architects do not need to be covered, while those who undertake only the occasional job might take out ad hoc insurance for an individual project.

Some architects practise without insurance. Although the vast majority encounter no problems, we encourage all architects to take out some form of professional indemnity insurance. That must, however, remain a matter for the individual and his professional organisation, and we certainly do not consider that such insurance should be compulsory. The matter should be dealt with in the contractual arrangements between the client and the architect or other building professional. If he wishes, the client may insist on employing someone with professional indemnity insurance.

Since the events to which the hon. Member referred took place, I have been pleased to hear that the Royal Institute of British Architects has introduced a rule that anyone appearing on its professional practice register must have some form of professional indemnity insurance.

Before saying more about that rule, I should explain that there are two main bodies concerned with the regulation of architects. The first is the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom, which is known as ARCUK, to which the hon. Member referred. It is the statutory body that has responsibility for registering all architects. To practise under the title "architect", an individual must by law be registered with ARCUK. As I said, however, there is no protection of the function of an architect, and anyone—registered or not—is allowed to design buildings and to undertake that function.

To be registered with ARCUK, a person must prove that he has the prescribed academic qualifications and practical training experience. There are also provisions for recognition of European Union qualifications and for assessment of overseas applicants. But admission to the register is entirely on the basis of ability to carry out the functions of an architect, and there are no provisions about professional indemnity insurance.

Current legislation will reform the structure of ARCUK and make minor changes to admission criteria. However, the changes to the criteria remain firmly based on the ability of the individual to function as an architect, and do not extend any of the criteria to cover financial or insurance matters. We believe that that is as it should be. The reforms, which gained widespread support during public consultation, are based firmly on the idea that ARCUK should be a minimalist body concentrating on the core functions of registration and discipline.

The other main body—I say "main" because there are also bodies for Scotland and Northern Ireland—is the Royal Institute of British Architects, which the hon. Member also mentioned. It is the professional body to which about 70 per cent. of architects belong. It has a royal charter, but it is not a statutory body. Its members refer to themselves as "chartered architects". I am sure that the hon. Gentleman intended his proposals to cover not only chartered architects but also those who are registered.

In the past, the RIBA has considered introducing compulsory professional indemnity insurance as a condition of membership. However, it decided against that for a number of practical reasons, not least because many of its members were not practising and it seemed unjust to require them to pay for an expensive insurance that they did not need.

The RIBA instead maintains a register of practices, for which the entry requirements have recently been expanded to include the need for adequate professional indemnity insurance. Entry to the register is entirely voluntary, but a large majority of architectural practices are entered on it.

The register is a major step forward, and means that a member of the public looking for an architect entered on it is guaranteed to get someone who is covered by some form of professional indemnity insurance. Having just heard an account from the hon. Member of the events affecting his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, I must say that, had this requirement been in force when they were first looking for an architect, it is quite possible that they might have chosen someone from this register with professional indemnity insurance.

I understand the concerns raised by the hon. Member, and I hope that, in the course of this response, I have been able to set them in context. I certainly understand why he is so concerned about this issue, and I trust that I have been able to reassure him to some extent, particularly on some of the measures that have been introduced by the architectural profession, including those which have been introduced since the events in this case took place.

I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are concerned to improve design and quality in building, and to remove defects and the need for litigation. We feel that that is best done by voluntary measures in co-operation with the industry rather than by compulsion. We also believe that the reforms contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, which is currently being debated in Committee, will be of great help to the architectural profession, and result in a streamlining of the system. I therefore hope that my remarks will have given the hon. Gentleman some reassurance in the light of the admittedly tragic experience of his constituents.

Single Currency (Pension Liabilities)

1 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I am pleased to have secured this debate. The question of a single currency and Europe's unfunded pension liabilities is extremely important. I first started asking parliamentary questions on this subject in 1991, when very little was known about it or its possible impact on the United Kingdom. However, the single currency is now on Europe's agenda, and it is vital that any debate should be based on all relevant material and information.

It seems less and less likely that an economic argument can be mounted in favour of a single currency. Indeed, it is worrying that it seems that it is becoming more and more a political venture with few economic facts to support the idea of a single currency. That contradicts the views of the Bundesbank and, I believe, those of the German Finance Minister; nevertheless, it can clearly be said that political arguments are being used to promote the single currency rather than the economic arguments that we were promised. That has serious consequences for the UK and we could have to bear enormous costs.

I have estimated some of the costs and found that the current UK national debt of some £300 billion is equivalent to about £5,000 per person. We have our own unfunded pension liabilities, although, as I shall point out, they are considerably less than Europe's. Our unfunded pension liabilities are equivalent to about £4,000 per man, woman and child in the UK, so our total debt, including unfunded pension liabilities, is about £9,000 per man, woman and child.

If Europe's unfunded pension liabilities were shared equally among all the countries and we had to take on a portion of them, we should have to accept something like £30,000 more debt per man, woman and child in the UK. That would be an enormous burden. I believe that the single currency would lead to our having to pay more taxes to service debts accumulated in Europe and to repay some or all of Europe's past debt.

I was concerned to read in the *Financial Times* this week that there are signs that Europe is not being entirely honest in its accounting methods. This week France has been shown to have been manipulating the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's report so that certain expenditure cuts were included in the budgetary estimates that it gave to the OECD, although in fact those cuts have not yet been agreed by the French Parliament. Germany is also having difficulty meeting the Maastricht criteria relating to the extent to which Government borrowing and debt increase each year.

The Maastricht criteria are indeed highly selective. They include requirements on debt, but exclude significant liabilities such as the unfunded pension liabilities in Europe. Pension fund debt is just as much a liability as a Government bond, but pension fund debt is often known as the invisible debt simply because it is not in the form of a bond and it has been quantified only in the past five years. It is nevertheless a real debt that eventually has to be paid.

I sometimes wonder why pension fund debt has only recently been quantified. I have to put it down to the simple fact that the software programmes and personal computers were not available to enough people to enable it to be quantified because it involves a complex and difficult calculation. Now, however, we can quantify previous politicians' promises that were not properly costed when they were made. I am talking about the politicians who made promises to young and middle-aged voters in the 1960s and 1970s. Those young and middle-aged voters did not realise that the promises they received were not capable of being met in the millennium, when the bills would start to come in.

Europe's social security systems are in a terrible mess compared with ours. Demographic changes are against the principal European countries. In particular, France, Germany and Italy are greatly affected. Their politicians made great promises, the impact of which will become very significant from the year 2005 onwards. Already, the financial markets that often deal in currencies some eight or 10 years ahead are beginning to wake up to the implications, and the impact of such promises on the financial markets will become more serious as we approach 2005.

There are few ways out of the problem for the countries of Europe, and the ways out that do exist are politically painful. Many of the countries affected have already shown, through strikes and other actions, that their peoples are not prepared to take on the responsibility of dealing with the problem.

I now give details of unfunded pension liabilities as a percentage of gross domestic product for the three major countries in the European Union. In France, such liabilities are estimated to be at least 69 per cent. of GDP, in West Germany 122 per cent., and in Italy 107 per cent. When examining those figures, we have to bear it in mind that the Maastricht criteria state that the national debt should be no more than 60 per cent. of GDP. I have cited only one estimate of the liability as it was quantified in Europe in 1990. More recent reports suggest that that liability is an even greater proportion of GDP.

In order to consider the issue properly, it might be helpful to put on record a few key terms. We have to get to grips with the implications of terms such as elderly dependency ratios, contribution rates and replacement rates. The replacement rate relates to someone's income when he retires compared with his income when he was in work. We also have to consider the implications of retirement ages and the indexing formula by which benefits are adjusted for inflation. We have to consider all those factors in all the countries of Europe when examining unfunded pension liabilities.

The bottom line is that such calculations enable us to measure the contribution gap, which is the difference between the current contribution levels and the annual liabilities from past commitments, all brought together through discounting accounting techniques to a value at today's level. The International Monetary Fund defines the contribution gap as

"the difference between sustainable contribution rate and projected overall contribution rate".

To prepare this speech, I read a number of studies, many of which were not around when I first started asking questions in 1991. The first known study was carried out by the Dutch civil service pension organisation ABP in about 1991. It concluded that Europe's unfunded pension liabilities were about 7,500 becu, or probably some £10 trillion at today's levels. The study was not greeted warmly by European Governments. Indeed, they were so worried by its implications that many argued with its methodology.

In 1993, a study by the OECD examined pension liabilities in the seven major economies. It confirmed that there was a significant problem, but used a different basis of calculation from the ABP study. In November 1993, the Centre for European Policy Studies published the study "The Hidden Liabilities of Basic Pension Schemes in the European Community". Not only does that study confirm the problem, but it shows how civil servants in member states have secured better pensions than private sector workers will ever secure.

Table 6 on page 16 of the study contrasts the pension privileges of Europe's civil servants with those of the private sector. It points out that, at 1990 prices, a French civil servant's pension is worth about £150,000 of capital, a West German civil servant's pension is worth about £230,000 of capital, and a Luxembourg civil servant's pension is worth about £250,000 of capital. No figures were given for United Kingdom civil servants in that table. Those figures show the level of commitments that have been given in Europe to public sector civil servants for their pensions and the impact of that cost on state pension schemes.

The most recent study was conducted by the International Monetary Fund. It is quoted in the current six-monthly report, but I have been unable to get hold of the working paper SM/96/7 of 19 January 1996, entitled "Aging Populations and the Fiscal Consequences of Public Pension Schemes with Particular Reference to the Major Industrial Countries". I hope that that working paper will be published, because it is in the national interests not only of the UK, but of all people in Europe and the world that it should be openly discussed and its implications considered.

I shall quote briefly from the IMF six-monthly report, which contains some information from the working paper, so that hon. Members can realise some of the implications involved. I shall start with good news in respect of the United Kingdom. The IMF says:

"The United Kingdom should experience almost no contribution gap".

For the German pension plan, however, it says something different:

"For the German pension plan's net asset position in 2050 to be the same as the initial net asset position in 1995, for instance, a sustainable contribution rate of 13.7 per cent. would be required each year. Assuming average contribution rates remain unchanged at just 10.3 per cent. of GDP over this period, Germany is likely to face a contribution gap of 3.4 per cent. of GDP."

That gap will be faced each year. The Maastricht criteria state that Germany's annual increase in debt cannot exceed 3 per cent. of GDP, yet its unfunded pension liability cost alone is equivalent to 3.4 per cent. of GDP a year.

The IMF goes on:

"Countries such as Japan, Germany and France, however, face contribution gaps of nearly 3.5 per cent. of GDP a year. To avoid a further buildup of pension debt over the next fifty five years, these countries need either to permanently increase social security tax collections by roughly 3.5 per cent. of GDP, or scale back benefits by a similar amount, or implement a combination of tax increases and payout reductions of this magnitude."

We already know that German industry is suffering as its indirect pension costs are too high. Europe has reached the limit of increasing social security taxes and other costs that are affecting labour costs. The UK is in a much better position in that area than those countries, and I would be extremely concerned if we took on their debt.

I should say that the United Kingdom is not perfect in that regard. We have made promises to 500,000 teachers, 1 million national health service employees, civil servants, policemen and firemen that are unfunded pension liabilities. Fortunately, because our overall financial structure is better than those countries on the continent, we can probably meet those promises—yet they are costing a considerable amount.

At today's prices, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was recently told in a parliamentary answer, unfunded pension liabilities in the UK are worth about £230 billion of debt. Even we in the United Kingdom have a problem, although the IMF thinks that we are much better off than most. I understand from a parliamentary answer that I received some time ago that, when the Government took office in 1979, public sector pensions cost £2.5 billion a year. Today, they cost about £10 billion a year. Over the next 20 or 30 years, I understand that that could rise to about £40 billion a year.

Why are unfunded pension liabilities a problem in relation to the single currency? Adopting a single currency means adopting a single European balance sheet. Ultimately, one cannot have a single currency without a single balance sheet. That means that we shall all share Europe's assets and liabilities. The liabilities of Germany, France and Italy would no longer relate solely to them, but would be shared in Europe.

European countries could adopt a number of possible solutions. They could try to increase their social security contributions, but, as I said, it seems unlikely that German industry could pay more in indirect taxes. The problems of higher unemployment in Europe mean that fewer contributors are available to pay future pensions. Fewer people in Europe are contributing to their social security systems because so many of them are out of work.

The Europeans could cut their pensions and raise retirement ages. Indeed, the IMF suggests in its six-monthly report that there will have to be

"adjustments in benefits and retirement ages, the latter because of steady gains in average lifespans."

It continues:

"Modifications could include reductions in the replacement ratio in countries where it is high"—

that means less income in retirement—

"and some slowing in the inflation indexing formula. In addition, governments could aim at linking individual pension contributions more closely to benefits—for example, by diverting part of contributions to individual retirement accounts—and at fostering increased personal responsibility for retirement support".

The IMF is recommending everything that the UK has already done. We have gone to the trouble of ensuring that those problems have been tackled, but it is very serious that such problems have not been tackled in Europe. There is a risk that, if we joined a single currency, we would have to take on part of those countries' problems.

All the studies conducted to date show that past pension commitments by European politicians, especially in France, Germany and Italy, are incapable of being met. That means that if those countries had to draw up their accounts on the same basis as British public companies on the stock exchange, auditors would qualify those countries' audit reports and declare them insolvent. Auditors would say that those countries would be unable to meet their liabilities when they fell due.

[Mr. David Shaw]

I should point out that the liabilities are truly massive. They are measured not in tens of millions of pounds, but in hundreds and thousands of billions of pounds. Studies confirm that the UK is probably the best placed country in Europe, if not in the world, on unfunded pension liabilities. They also point out that entering a single currency would mean that the UK would have to give up its competitive advantage, which has been hard earned and is significant from 2005 onwards.

We can also conclude from the studies that the Maastricht criteria are meaningless figures based on false accounting since they do not include the unfunded pension liabilities of Europe. If those liabilities were included, no country would meet the criteria that have been set down.

1.19 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am grateful to be able to contribute briefly to the debate. As he said in his speech, the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and I have crossed paths in parliamentary questions on the nature of the size of unfunded public sector pension rights in Britain. If I represented Dover rather than Birkenhead, perhaps my sights would have crossed to Europe, rather than crossing the Irish channel to Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman raised two points of crucial importance, to which we all want replies. First, he spoke about the size of the national debt and unfunded pension debt in Britain. If it is spread out evenly, it represents £5,000 per person for the national debt and £4,000 per person for unfunded pension liabilities. If we have to share the European debt for unfunded pension liability, however, the figure increases to £30,000 per person. The hon. Gentleman properly raised this question: if we have a single currency, how will the Government prevent taxes from being imposed on people in Britain who have already provided for their own pension entitlements, to pay for people in Europe who have refused to do so?

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman was too polite and gentle to suggest to the Treasury Bench the underlying theme of his debate. If the Government only had a grip on their nerve, a sense of humour and some real finesse on the issue, they would be totally committed to a single European currency, but would say that, before we could go down that path, we should have to address the problem of debt. The difficulties of calculation and getting the French, the Germans and the Italians to face up to the size of their debt will probably take us well into the millennium before we are in a position to decide on the terms of debt, let alone how we might proceed to a single currency.

1.21 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): First, let me thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) for introducing such an important debate today. I am well aware of his long-term concern and his in-depth knowledge of these matters, which he demonstrated in his remarks.

My hon. Friend was quite right to say that ignoring the issue will not make it go away, so it is of particular importance to note that there has been considerable work on it, including a number of studies, to which he referred. No doubt some member countries of the European Community look at them with greater or less favour because of the message they send to those countries.

The Government have consistently behaved in a fiscally responsible and prudent manner over pensions. We have long recognised the effects of demographic and other changes on the financing of future pensions. We have acted early and wisely to forestall pressures on future taxpayers and have encouraged individuals to take responsibility for providing for their future needs while at the same time safeguarding a minimal level of state provision.

The same cannot be said of some of our European partners, although they have recognised the problems that they are facing and have started to take at least some action to deal with what is described quite rightly as the pensions time-bomb. We can help them and there are some excellent opportunities for the United Kingdom to do so.

Our system of funded pensions is a model of its kind. We have recognised the importance of having a sustainable pension system in place for future generations. The basic state pension is and will remain the cornerstone of pension provision in the United Kingdom. Most people want to look forward to incomes closer to what they have been used to earning when at work, and funded private pensions are the key to that.

Recent work by the OECD and the IMF shows just how successful the United Kingdom has been. According to the OECD, pension payments are expected to cause the national debts of Germany and France to double as a proportion of GDP between 2000 and 2030, on current policies. My hon. Friend put those figures in a more human context, but whichever way one looks at them, it is a very large debt that has to be addressed right now.

The problem is not limited to the European Union—Japan faces the same problems—but the United Kingdom and the European Union are examining problems that affect us all and are the subject of today's debate.

If one looks at the figures in another way, the OECD expects our public expenditure on pensions to peak at around 5 per cent. of GDP, compared with between 15 and 20 per cent. in Germany, France and Italy.

Some action has started to be taken in Italy, Germany and France. Italy approved plans to reform its pension system last year; Germany has set up a commission to review the current pension system; and the French Government plan to supplement the public scheme with private pension schemes. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we are waiting to see whether those proposals manifest themselves in practice, as we have been told they will.

My hon. Friend spoke about the single currency and its effect on unfunded pensions in other countries. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) also touched on that point. My hon. Friend was right to raise a proper concern relating to the national accounts. I, too, am concerned that in some European countries political arguments on a single currency seem to take over from hard-headed economic reasoning.

My hon. Friend is well aware that the Government have said consistently that the United Kingdom will join a single currency only if it is in the national interests to do so. It is because the Prime Minister secured our right to

opt out that Parliament and Government can take that decision at the appropriate time in the light of all the circumstances. It also raises the question how Government debt is defined within the Maastricht convergence criteria for all countries and where unfunded pension liabilities fit in.

Unfunded pension liabilities do not appear in the national accounts. The Maastricht measure of debt, which is the general Government gross debt, is a measure of gross financial liabilities outstanding—that is, liabilities to repay earlier borrowing. It does not include liabilities for other forms of future spending, such as unfunded pension liabilities. Including such liabilities within measures of debt would introduce a number of problems, the main one being that most member states would probably dispute the figures. However, the need to keep their budget deficits below 3 per cent. of GDP will constrain member states with very expensive unfunded pension systems. When those pensions come to be paid, their Governments will need either to raise taxes or to reduce other expenditure to remain within the 3 per cent. limit. Tough decisions need to be made, but they are sensible ones in any event.

Under the Maastricht treaty, member states are responsible for their own fiscal policies and their own pension provision. Member states have the right to determine their own taxation and expenditure plans, but they are also duty bound to ensure that their own plans do not force others to bail them out.

Article 104 of the treaty specifically rules out any prospect of one member state bailing out another. That provision extends not just to the purchase of the debt of other member states, but to offering overdraft facilities or any other credit facilities. That "no bail out" clause safeguards one member state from the actions of another and ensures that member states act responsibly in keeping their finances in order.

In addition, the excessive deficits procedure set out in the treaty keeps up the pressure on sound public finances. Member states' debt and deficit performance is monitored with a view to restraining excessive deficits. For those member states that participate in monetary union, the Council may also consider applying sanctions if participating member states persist in running excessive deficits. Those requirements are taken seriously by other member states, as they are by the United Kingdom. Many hon. Members will have heard of the stability pact that was proposed by the German Chancellor, and I know that my hon. Friend is well aware of what it involves. It aims to apply the excessive deficits procedure even more rigorously to member states that participate in monetary union.

It is a long and complicated matter. We have touched upon it in today's debate perhaps only superficially, but the main issues that have been raised and that are related to unfunded pensions and the difficulties that all Governments must face are decisions and objectives that will not go away.

The UK has done a good job in recognising the issue and deciding how to deal with it. Elsewhere in Europe, the decisions are being made rather late in the day. I hope that those Governments are aware that they must take action whether or not they intend to join a single currency, as it is in their interests to look at unfunded pension liabilities. If they do not, they will pass debt on to their heirs, rather than assets. The matter is the subject of on-going discussions, not just in the House, but elsewhere. One thing is clear: member states must recognise the importance of fiscal discipline and responsibility, including responsibility—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

Health Care (Highlands)

1.30 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I am grateful for the timely opportunity to raise this issue, and I look forward to the Minister's response. The debate is occasioned by two issues on the immediate agenda of health provision. I wish to refer to the care of the elderly in the highlands in particular, but I will touch on a more deep-seated anxiety in a moment.

Two specific issues have given rise to the debate. First, there has been huge controversy and complexity regarding the funding of long-term residential care for the elderly. Secondly, an apparent impasse has been reached in the contract negotiations between Highland health board and the respective health trusts. At the Raigmore Hospital NHS trust in particular, there is a £2 million gap between the board and the trust in the discussions that are taking place.

I am not against the move towards the purchaser-provider split—nor was I when it was proposed—and I did not oppose the previous move towards general management within the health service; I thought that those were sensible reforms. Over the years, I have not always been a fan of Highland health board. It has been the subject of controversy, ranging from its ill-fated attempt to site a private pay bed at Broadford hospital on the Isle of Skye—a proposal vetoed by the then Minister with responsibility for health, now the Secretary of State for Scotland—to its abortive attempt at pre-emptive closure of Gesto hospital on the Isle of Skye. The health board and I have not always seen eye to eye, and I am not here to defend the status quo.

I was opposed to the move towards trust status that built on the internal market in health care in the highlands. That was partly because of the well-rehearsed national arguments at the time and partly because of two specific local factors that struck me as making full trust status within an internal health market particularly inappropriate in the context of a vast rural area such as the highlands. The geography of the area and the pressure that that places on the delivery of health care inevitably make the practical grafting of an internal market on to the system extremely difficult, if not totally counter to the principles that are supposed underpin it.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute) *rose—*

Mr. Kennedy: My hon. Friend, whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber, shares my concerns.

Mrs. Michie: My hon. Friend referred to the geography of the area. Does he agree that there is also a problem facing remote, rural and inducement practices? Since 1985, those practices no longer receive expenses for postgraduate training. That puts those practices at a severe disadvantage in terms of keeping up to date with modern medical practices—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is a rather long intervention in a half-hour debate.

Mrs. Michie: I am sure that my hon. Friend understands what I am talking about.

Mr. Kennedy: I certainly do understand, and we live in hope that the Minister also understands. I see that some consultation is going on to that effect. My hon. Friend has offered a good specific example of the kind of practical difficulties that arise.

The artificiality of competition in the health market within the highlands comes into most sharp focus when one looks at the position of the Highland health board as the purchaser and the Raigmore Hospital NHS trust as the provider. We know that the health board has nowhere else to go to place its contract each year, as it has no alternative regional acute facility providing the range of specialties offered by Raigmore. There is an artificiality to the debate, and if the system becomes bogged down—as it has done—it will create problems in the current financial year for the managers of the trust and the *management of the health* board.

Last year, the Minister established an important principle—although perhaps he was not particularly anxious so to do. When the Highland communities trust and similar operations in Grampian ran into financial difficulties, he was obliged to step in and acknowledge that, to a certain extent, the public purse would have to bail out trusts with funding problems. That development was indicative of a wider anxiety. The trusts in Grampian and Highland were at the head of the queue in Scotland, and the fact that they are in some financial difficulty this early suggests that we are seeing the tip of a national iceberg. There is a further example in Ayrshire of the difficulties being encountered by trusts, a subject that will be hotly debated in the Scottish Grand Committee in Ayr next week.

Last year, the crisis in the Highlands communities trust was overcome, but problems remain for it. The locum chief executive, Fiona Mackenzie, told me in anticipation of this debate that the first financial problem related to bridging finance for the on-going project closure of Craig Dunain hospital in Inverness. There have been meetings between the health board, the trust and the Scottish Office, and it would be timely if the Minister would tell us where the matter now stands.

The second problem stems in the main from the logjam that has been reached on the Raigmore trust, but the fact that contracts have still not been agreed for the current year has also had an effect. There is a difference of £2 million between the trust's price, £46.8 million, and what the health board is willing to offer, £44.8 million. The difference relates to activity levels and the fact that, in the past year, the trust has been operating with a busier throughput than was expected and is incurring larger overheads as a result.

If one looks at the range of options—perhaps I should say the range of dilemmas—facing the trust's management at the moment, one sees that, to a certain extent, the trust has been a victim of its own activities. It is considering a number of options. Given the rising number of out-patients, the trust is increasingly unable to meet its own target times, and a decrease in the extent of out-patient facilities provided is being considered. Another option concerns the vexed issue of ward closures.

A third option—to which I wish to refer specifically, as it has in many ways been the most emotive locally—is to increase the rent levels for student nurses in Inverness. Indeed, it was revealed in March that it was intended to increase rent from £54.64 a month to £150. That is an

exorbitant increase and, despite the fact there has been some to-ing and fro-ing between the student nurses and the trust, the issue is far from resolved.

The options are a range of dilemmas, which are far from satisfactory. They suggest that a number of questions remain outstanding. First, why is there such a gap in perception between the management of the health board and the management of the trust over what is the right price and the right level of activity that can be delivered on budget? Two sets of professionals are involved in the same service, so why are they £2 million apart this far into the financial year?

Secondly, given the examples I have cited, the Minister would surely accept that to expect the trust to go on and on with its downward drive for on-going 3 per cent. efficiency savings is just not realistic in the context of the Highland health board area, not least given the kind of geographical overheads that accrue, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) referred. Thirdly, the Minister should not set his face against having to provide further cash for Raigmore, if need be, as he had to do last year with the Highland communities trust, to make possible an agreement on a reasonable level of contract which is not detrimental to the overall levels of patient care.

Such is the problem as seen from the point of view of the trust, but what about the perspective of the Highland health board? Its general difficulty in funding is that it is one of only two health boards in Scotland to find themselves more than 1 per cent. below the SHARE—Scottish health authorities revenue equalisation—formula for annual allocation. That shortfall again relates to geography, because that formula, when applied to the Highland health board area, does not take adequate account of the sparsity factor. I know that the management executive of the health service in Scotland is to review the funding formula. I hope that the Minister can guarantee that the specific difficulties being experienced by the Highland health board will be carefully taken into account and that that review will be sensitive to its difficulties.

I reiterate what I said about judging the issue in terms of what happened to the Highland communities trust. The health board is involved in the long-term closure of Craig Dunain and the transfer to community care, so I hope that the Minister can give us a more detailed update from its point of view on the additional bridging finance that it is seeking to give effect to that transfer.

The final problem relating to funding difficulties refers to the social work budget of Highland council, which has a £350,000 shortfall. It is having to consider, as Perth and Kinross council was obliged to do recently, the transfer of its residential care of the elderly from council auspices to the private sector. When that suggestion was first mooted a few weeks ago, it caused sheer uproar throughout the length and breadth of the Highland council area. I went to visit one of the four homes on the initial hit list, Urray house at Muir of Ord in my constituency. The sense of horror among the elderly patients at what may happen to them was saddening and sickening.

I have raised the issue with the Minister at a recent sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee. There appears to be a gulf between what the social work directorate tells me about funding and what the Minister is being advised about that by his Department. The Minister has agreed to a meeting, and I would be grateful if he would get around the table with representatives of the Highland council, and if necessary the relevant sectors within the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, to see whether the shortfalls in the social work budget identified by the director, Mr. Jim Dick, match the account that the Minister put forward, I do not doubt with good intent, during our previous exchanges on the subject.

I welcome the fact that, in providing the crucial service of residential care for the elderly, the Highland council has by no means shelved the option of opting wholesale for the private sector. It has, however, announced plans for a seminar later in the year to look at the subject in a slightly broader and more measured context than has been possible. That seminar, which would offer a broader review, accompanied by a detailed comparison of the figures at the Scottish Office level and those at the directorate level of the council, would be extremely helpful.

Three broad issues must be considered. First, one must consider the transfers as a result of the closure of Craig Dunain hospital and the bridging finance that is important to the health board and the communities trust. Secondly, one must consider the on-going difficulties surrounding the contract discussion and the £2 million gap between the Raigmore trust and the health board. Thirdly, one must consider the health board's perception of its own on-going problem—persistent under-funding due to the inflexibility of the SHARE formula in terms of the sparsity factor.

The Minister should note that there is a great feeling of unease and alarm across the highlands at the moment concerning specific provision for the elderly as well as health care in general. In his reply, I hope that he will make a significant contribution to allay the anxieties of those in most immediate care as well as to meet the perceptions of those who feel that they or their loved ones will be in need of care in times to come.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): If Highland council disagrees with the distribution formula as operated by COSLA, the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) should advise it to make strong representations, to send in all the available evidence and to copy it for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who has responsibility for the highlands, and also for me. We will look at it.

On 28 May, the health board submitted an application for bridging finance in 1996-97. A preliminary meeting involving the Scottish Office, the health board, the Highland communities trust and the social work department was held on 30 May. That meeting provided an opportunity for helpful and constructive exchange of views. It is essential to be clear, however, that bridging finance is not the principle means of enabling community development. Funding must continue to come from resources released from the hospital sector for reinvestment in community health services and transfers to local authorities for social care provision.

The hon. Member is obviously interested in service developments at Raigmore. I am aware that the trust has developed proposals to open a new haematology-oncology facility at Raigmore. That will be dependent on the necessary resources being in place. It is one of the

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

issues being discussed within the current contract negotiations. As hon. Members will appreciate, it is simply not possible to fund all the developments that one might wish to see simultaneously introduced since, despite the billions of pounds of public funds devoted to the NHS, we still have to work within finite resources.

I know that the hon. Member is interested in the proposals that the trust has in mind for increasing the number of clinical sessions for rheumatoid arthritis sufferers. The position on that initiative is similar in that much depends on the outcome of the contract negotiations.

The hon. Member touched on rent increases for student nurses at Raigmore, as did the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) earlier. I understand that the previous rent levels were unrealistically low compared with market levels and levels paid by students in other areas. I understand that the increased rents are now being phased in over one year instead of six months as originally planned.

The hon. Member may be interested to know that there is to be a primary care resource centre at Easter Ross. I congratulate the local Members of Parliament on taking the initiative in undertaking the feasibility study. We welcome the vision and concept behind the proposal and look to purchasers for a definite local commitment on how the proposal is to be developed. The ensuing business case will be considered on its merits.

I welcome the opportunity for the debate. The principle to which the hon. Member alluded is extremely important: patient standards and patient care must not be allowed to suffer. It is, of course, the responsibility of the Minister with responsibility for health to ensure that that does not happen.

I am well aware that the Highland health board has definite challenges because of its particular geographical circumstances, which mean that it is spread over such a large area. It has to strike a balance between delivering services in small local communities and more centrally at Inverness. It is working hard on the development of locality plans in partnership with the trust, the Highland council and other agencies. It is working with local health councils and taking the views of the local communities. I am sure that the board will take those views into account when drawing up its strategy for health care services in the highlands.

The hon. Member mentioned the contract negotiation position affecting the Raigmore Hospital NHS trust. In the current contracting round, a gap remains between what is proposed and the price that the board is prepared to pay for an agreed and appropriate level of service. Several trusts in Scotland are still negotiating with their purchasers about contracts for this year, and Raigmore is no exception. That is not unusual at this stage in the process.

These exchanges are designed to produce better outcomes for patients and better value for money locally. The provision of a high and continuing standard of patient care is of the utmost importance, and all concerned are working to resolve the outstanding contracting issues to maintain and improve the level of services to patients. My officials in the management executive are in close contact with the board and the trust about the current state of negotiations and will press for a resolution to be achieved as soon as possible.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Minister reflect on a phrase he used? He said that it was "not unusual" for contracts not to be agreed by this stage in the financial year, and that it was most important to maintain standards of patient care. From the management point of view, the longer the uncertainty continues, the deeper the cuts they must make the further into the financial year one gets. How come, therefore, standards in patient delivery will not suffer because of the change that has been made? That does not make sense.

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: As I have said, we want to reach a settlement as soon as possible. The officials of the management executive stand ready to give guidance, should there be any impasse in the negotiations.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Is a deadline being set?

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: All I can say is that we shall work extremely hard to ensure that the necessary agreements are reached, and at this stage it is not necessary for me to intervene. I believe that the negotiations are proceeding well, and we shall closely monitor the position and keep a close eye on it.

In general, the Highland communities trust has introduced a range of innovative developments, including new facilities for the treatment of Parkinson's disease and a new drug and alcohol dependency centre. It has begun upgrading the Belford hospital in Fort William, as well as completing new community health centres in Gairloch and Dundonald.

Specific issues confront the Highland health board. For example, I know that facilities for the patients of Craig Dunain are far from ideal at Inverness. I am pleased to hear, therefore, that the health board, the Highland communities trust and Highland council social work department, working together, have made significant progress in developing plans for the care of the mentally ill. There are already some excellent examples of well-resourced care facilities in the highland region for patients discharged from Craig Dunain.

The Highland communities trust has developed proposals for a new acute facility. I also understand that plans for a long-stay unit are well developed. That is encouraging, and we look forward to reading, in the very near future, the finalised and locally agreed plans, which will deliver improved services to all who need them. We will monitor the position.

I now turn to the issue of community care in the Highland health board area. The board is working with the local social work and housing authorities in continuing joint assessments of local care needs. They are working towards the organisation of best local care that matches local needs. In doing so, they are aware of my position that, for the NHS continuing care sector, no long-stay hospital will close before appropriate care facilities and services are well in place in the community, and no long-stay patient should be transferred to alternative models of care before that care and the necessary support and accommodation are in place and available.

Working towards the aim of improving the daily lives of vulnerable people in the area who need support, last year alone the health board transferred about £3.4 million to the local authority towards the cost of care in the community.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye may wish to know that the sum total of the resources transferred from health to local authorities throughout

Scotland last year was £45 million. Substantial additional resources have been allocated to local authorities to meet their community care responsibilities. In the current year, Highland council has £24.5 million compared with £23.9 million in 1995-96.

The allocation to the former Highland regional council was generous. The council was one of two in Scotland that received additional resources in the form of transitional protection. That reflected the historically high level of Department of Social Security expenditure in the region. Transitional protection was provided for three years to give the council time to plan for the eventual position. The scheme was initiated by the Scottish Office, against initial opposition by COSLA representatives on the distribution committee.

This year, the DSS transfer resources already in the baseline, and the new resources for 1996-97, have been made available to Highland on the same basis as to all other authorities—that is, on the basis of a distribution weighted by the proportion of elderly and disabled people in each area. That is the approach agreed with COSLA's distribution committee, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye will agree that that is a fair and reasonable basis on which to distribute resources.

It should be mentioned that the Highland health board area has low occupation levels in private and voluntary sector residential homes. Given the lower cost of homes in those sectors relative to the council's homes, there is obviously scope for the council to make more cost-effective use of its resources by making more placements in independent homes.

I now turn to some specific issues relating to the trust in the highlands and to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Kennedy: The Minister phrased that last part very neutrally. Does he support that approach?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Whether appropriate standards are maintained must be ascertained. A Scottish Office working group is considering residential care and is due to report in approximately three weeks' time. It has been considering the difficult issues that have occurred the length and breadth of Scotland. We intend to act on the group's recommendations. I have not seen the fine print yet, but we believe that they will in principle be soundly based and we intend to act on that report as soon as it comes to hand. This is essentially a matter for local decision, provided the necessary high standards are maintained.

I shall now discuss in more detail the constituency problems of the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye. As he will recall, we had a helpful discussion on 17 October 1995 when, in an Adjournment debate, he raised the problems then affecting the Highland communities trust. At that stage, the trust faced a shortfall of about £1.4 million between its expenditure and its contract income. I hope that, during the debate, I made it clear that my main concern was the action being taken by the trust to resolve its financial difficulties and to ensure that patient care was not compromised.

Following the resignation of the chief executive of the trust and the departure of the finance director, officials in the Scottish Office Department of Health and I moved swiftly to ensure that a sound management scheme was in place. From a projected deficit of approximately £1.4 million, the new management team produced a financial strategy that balanced the books and put the trust on a sound financial footing for the future.

A key component in the plan was the identification of a cost improvement programme to deliver reductions in recurring revenue expenditure and a revamping of the organisational structure. I was pleased to note the streamlining of the management structure to make it more appropriate to the tasks that lie ahead for the trust.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have been especially anxious to ensure that, throughout the health service, management costs are reduced to a minimum consistent with the effective and efficient running of the NHS, so that the maximum possible amount of resources can be devoted to direct patient care. The locum management team and the board at Highland communities trust are to be commended for the way in which they have brought the trust's finances back on track and shown what can be achieved with commitment and resolution.

The Caithness and Sutherland trust, although one of the smallest in terms of operating income, has been especially successful in developing new services. Four new health centres were opened in 1995 at Durness, Tongue, Brora and Helmsdale, and two more are planned for completion in the current financial year at Dunbeath and Kinlochbervie. This is an impressive programme of work, designed to ensure that, even for communities in the more remote parts of the country, high-quality health care can and will still be delivered.

Those developments are hardly signs of a trust being in financial trouble—quite the reverse. The reform of the health service and the creation of trusts have resulted in more patients than ever being treated more quickly by more clinical staff delivering better services.

I now turn to primary care. Patients in the highlands receive a good level of screening and preventative services from GPs in the area, especially on immunisation, child health surveillance and cervical cytology. Primary care also provides chronic disease management for conditions such as asthma and diabetes. Patients also benefit from GP fundholding, which has brought physiotherapy into a practice setting and open access for endoscopy.

There are eight standard fundholding practices and 12 primary care purchasing practices, covering 27 per cent. of the population. Two of these standard fundholding practices are taking part in a total purchasing pilot, which enables GPs to purchase all health care services for their patients. I am aware, as I mentioned earlier, of the feasibility study for a primary care resource centre. The GPs are to be warmly congratulated. We welcome their vision and the determination behind that proposal.

In the past four years, Highland health board has secured funding of more than—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Mearnskirk Hospital Site

1. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future of the Mearnskirk hospital site, Newton Mearns; and if he will make a statement. [30071]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The board has asked the Victoria Infirmary NHS trust to develop a new 60-bed elderly care facility on the site, resulting in much improved accommodation for frail elderly patients which matches the assessed future needs of local people in that sector.

Mr. Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. I should also like to thank the Greater Glasgow health board and the Victoria trust for the recent constructive and useful meetings that they have had with me. Does my hon. Friend agree that the board has been sensible to abandon the European procurement process and contract with the trust? As I understand it—perhaps my hon. Friend will confirm this—the trust will need to put in a detailed application to the management executive. Can he assure my constituents that that application will be treated speedily and sympathetically in the light of the importance of the project for the frail elderly?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, that seems a sensible way to proceed. The trust will need to produce a business case explaining why public financing is necessary and I can assure my hon. Friend that we will look at this sympathetically and speedily.

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) may qualify as a frail elderly patient when he hears the result of the next election in the Eastwood constituency.

Can the Minister confirm that the Victoria trust is the same NHS trust that is currently privatising its cleaning, its catering, its portering and its estates services under pressure from underfunding from the Government? Can the Minister confirm that the development is taking place on the site where NHS land was recently sold off to private housing developers and which is currently being used for private profit on behalf of those private housing developers? Will he, for once, own up to the fact that, under the banner of the private finance initiative, the Government are privatising anything and everything that can be turned to a profit inside the national health service?

If the Minister is looking for good news stories about health in the run-up to the general election, I can make a suggestion. Why does he not announce that the Government are abandoning the Tory privatisation of the health service, Tory GP fundholding and the Tory internal market in the NHS? That is the only good news that the voters in Scotland want to hear.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We cannot abandon something that we are not engaged in. The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that NHS services will remain free at the point of delivery. Tender specifications for hospital building, which will bring about much more speedy building, are to be welcomed. The leader of the hon. Gentleman's party has said that he believes in the use of private finance, so the hon. Gentleman should address his remarks to his own leader.

Community Service Orders

2. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are being taken to ensure that those serving community service orders are deterred from offending again. [30072]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has announced a series of measures to ensure that community service in Scotland is seen by both the offenders and the community as a rigorous and constructive penalty.

Mr. Duncan: Does my hon. Friend agree that community service should not be a soft option but a fitting punishment for the crime? The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals to toughen the regime and has said that they are humiliating. Does not that confirm once again that the Labour party is more concerned about the humiliation of the offender than the humiliation of the victim?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We certainly want to shift the emphasis away from the criminal towards the victim. We believe that community service orders should be rigorous and have considerable benefit to the community. For example, the refurbishment of the King George V playing fields, first phase, will be of immense benefit to the local communities. The programme contains other projects—for example, the removal of graffiti, the cleaning up of cycleways and waterways, the opening of footpaths and the renovation of buildings. Community service certainly should not be a soft option.

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister must surely accept that crime in Scotland has doubled under this Government. Does he accept any responsibility for that, and will the Government do anything about it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The overall crime figures have come down in the past three years and that is a sign of the effectiveness of the police, to whom we have given maximum support in the form of high-technology closed-circuit television and many other projects throughout Scotland. We will work on that success and we are determined to give the police the maximum resources available.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Secretary of State for Scotland's determination to be tougher on crime and to strengthen penalties is welcomed by most people, except those who are soft on crime and soft on the causes of crime? Does he agree that one of the causes of crime in Scotland is the dreary municipal estates built by Labour-controlled councils in the 1960s?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That is one of the reasons why we support urban regeneration so strongly. We wish to remove that dreariness and to provide more opportunities for jobs. Under urban aid, we provide more than £80 million a year to ensure that those who live in such communities have much better chances. As part of the process, it is absolutely necessary to take a tough line on crime prevention.

Mr. McFall: The Labour party agrees fully that those serving community service orders should be prevented from offending, but does the Minister realise that the main issue for the community today is Gavin McGuire, who murdered Mhairi Julyan? Why was he released only 20 days before he committed that murder? Why did the Crown Office say that there was insufficient evidence to proceed and yet, when the trial for murder happened, it brought in that evidence? Is not the action of the Secretary of State a knee-jerk reaction to stifle debate? Will the Minister join us in the call for an independent inquiry to get to the root of the problem and to prevent the Crown Office from sinking into disrepute as a result of the case?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Lord Advocate, as Law Officer, is responsible for the prosecution service. He is independent of the Government. I am the Minister with responsibility for home affairs, not Minister for the interior and it would be totally improper for me to try to direct the Law Officers on which prosecutions to undertake. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that, for repeat offenders in serious sex cases, the law should be toughened and they should face life sentences.

Employment Prospects

3. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on employment prospects in the highlands and islands. [30073]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): They remain excellent.

Mr. Macdonald: Is the Minister aware of the continuing damage being done to the economy and the employment prospects of the Western Isles and Skye by the high tolls on the Skye bridge? Is he aware that, on the new Severn bridge, which was opened today, the tolls will be 30 per cent. lower than the charges imposed on cars using the Skye bridge? How can the Minister justify that difference, especially when the Severn bridge was much more expensive to build? Is it not time that he listened to the weight of public opinion in the highlands, and indeed throughout Scotland, and scrapped the unpopular and damaging private toll regime?

Mr. Kynoch: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman takes that line when a bridge has been provided, using private finance, for the people of Skye much sooner that it would have been provided if the project had had to wait in the queue for public expenditure. The tolls are set at the level of the old ferry fares, so the cost of getting to Skye is no greater using the bridge. If people buy discounted tickets, the price of a single crossing can be lowered to £2.44. That compares with a charge for motor cars and caravans to cross the new Severn bridge of £3.80. The hon. Gentleman did not point out that the Severn bridge concession is for some 30 years, so the tolls will remain for that period, whereas tolls will be in existence on the Skye bridge for only some 14 to 17 years until the cost is paid back. The bridge is of great benefit to the people of Skye and it means that weather does not cut them off from the mainland. The people of Skye should welcome the improved transport to and from their island.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: In view of what the Minister said at the end of his reply, I hope that he will take the opportunity after Question Time to give a resumé of those benefits to the local protesters who are visiting Westminster today to make clear the depth of not just local opposition but Scotland-wide and international opposition to what is being done. *[Interruption.]* Those who laugh do so in ignorance because they do not know what is being said in other countries about this matter.

As the direct employment loss so far has come from the closure of the ferry, when will the Minister come clean about how much more the public purse in Scotland is having to subvent Caledonian MacBrayne's other ferry networks as a direct result of the loss of subsidy that was generated by the high charges on the original ferry? Why will he not tell us that, if he believes in the commercial case for this bridge?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman fails to recognise the difference between the bridge and the ferry. Of course, the ferry was subject to weather conditions, and that was amply exemplified just before the bridge officially opened when, I understand, an ambulance, a police car and a lorry load of fresh fish from South Uist, which was bound for Paris, crossed the bridge when the ferry was not running because of bad weather. Rather than associating himself with people who seem to be intent on flaunting the law and trying to follow a policy of non-payment, which seems surprising for the hon. Gentleman, he should recognise the benefits that the project has brought to that part of Scotland.

Inward Investment

4. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what incentives are currently available to attract inward investment to Scotland. [30074]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Among the incentives for inward investment to Scotland are a skilled and flexible work force, low taxes, low inflation and the absence of the social chapter or a tartan tax.

Mr. Nicholls: Is not my right hon. Friend too modest to say that it is a remarkable tribute to his efforts at the Cabinet table that Scotland receives such a massive amount of inward investment and a good deal more for public expenditure than does England? Now that the west country has its own designated Minister, does my right hon. Friend look forward to a time when a similar achievement could be brought about there, perhaps by a modest transfer from the Scottish Office budget?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the success of Scotland in attracting inward investment. I am sure that the west country will

strongly compete for that investment. However, I do not take the credit for Ministers but give it to Locate in Scotland and Scottish Enterprise.

I see from today's newspapers in Scotland that the Labour party would abolish Scottish Enterprise as part of the recommendations of the McFadden Commission. The newspapers state that the distinguished Miss McFadden says that Scottish Enterprise will have part of its role taken over by a Scottish Parliament and another part taken over by local government, and that it will then cease to exist.

Mr. Hood: The Secretary of State will appreciate that street crime is a disincentive to inward investment. Will he take this opportunity to reject the suggestion by the Scottish National party to commercialise prostitution and turn Scotland into the greatest whorehouse in Europe, and assure us that they will have none of that nonsense in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the Scottish nationalists come up with some eccentric ideas but, as far as I am aware, they have not advocated prostitution as a matter that should be part of our inward investment campaign. The views that they have expressed on that matter are entirely consistent with the most left-wing and most radical party in Europe.

Mrs. Ewing: On the issue of inward investment, would the Secretary of State care to comment on how many jobs originally pursued by Locate in Scotland went to the Republic of Ireland because of the local corporation tax that is levied there—at 10 per cent.? Will he also, instead of allowing his Minister to conduct an argument through the press with the Federation of Small Businesses, organise a meeting to discuss with it the importance of giving support to indigenous industries?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised that a Member of the Scottish National party—of all parties—should try to argue that Ireland has an advantage because of the rate of corporation tax that it has to offer. If the hon. Lady would care to make an appointment with Locate in Scotland, it will explain to her why we can offer far more than Ireland in terms of financial incentives, and why the 10 per cent. corporation tax levied in Ireland is not a comparative advantage over Scotland. When she has had that meeting, perhaps she will join us in propounding the benefits of Scotland as opposed to Ireland.

Beef Production

5. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the National Farmers Union for Scotland concerning Scottish beef production. [30075]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble friend the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment and I have regular meetings with the Scottish NFU.

Mr. Lidington: Will my right hon. Friend continue to make every effort to secure the complete lifting of the beef export ban, in the interests both of Scottish farmers and of meat exporting companies like Donald Russell of Aberdeenshire, the sales director of which is a constituent of mine? Will my right hon. Friend join me in deploring the reported remarks this morning by the German Health Minister, who in effect said that, whatever is decided by the European Union, Germany will maintain a unilateral national ban on the import of British beef and beef products, in defiance of its treaty obligations and European law?

Mr. Forsyth: Yes; and yes, I do.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: With regard to beef production, the Glasgow meat market in my constituency was advised by the Scottish Office, as late as 1992, to upgrade its facilities with fridges and stainless steel products to bring it into line with the European Community, and only a month ago received a fax from the Scottish Office to say that it should cease production forthwith. The people who work there have been put out of a job. They have had a great deal of investment and their mortgages and homes are being threatened. All I ask is that the Minister, the noble Lord Lindsay, meets them. I hope that the Secretary of State will pass on that request to him.

Mr. Forsyth: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. Many people in Scotland are affected by this completely unjustified ban on good, quality Scottish beef. Of course I understand the concerns of his constituents, and my noble Friend will, as always, be pleased to meet the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to bring a delegation from his constituency.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend accept that all farmers and those involved in the food chain very much appreciate his efforts and those of the noble Lord Lindsay in trying to resolve the problem? Will my right hon. Friend do two things: first, will he try to speed up the 30-month disposal of heifers, which has not yet started; and, secondly, will he produce a newsletter each week, giving explicit details of how the scheme is proceeding and what farmers should do to help their own interests?

Mr. Forsyth: Officials in Scotland have been working with the industry. The 30-month scheme is now being administered by a group drawn from all the industry's interests, and we have made substantial progress. The task is enormous, and I fully understand the anxiety and concerns expressed by my right hon. Friend and others. His suggestion of a regular newsletter to farmers, some of whom may or may not be members of the National Farmers Union, is good, and I shall certainly ask officials to take that on board and get such a project under way.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Secretary of State accept that, from the outset of the crisis, one potentially helpful step is the role of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce? Does he further accept that the low volume of meat that has gone into intervention from Scottish farms has been disappointing and that there has been considerable bureaucracy? What steps have he and his fellow Ministers taken to use their good offices with the intervention board to ensure that more meat is moved to try to reduce some of the backlog that is building up, particularly as another tranche is coming on stream?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I know of one particularly astonishing case from his constituency, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when it was drawn to his attention. A report is being compiled and a number of changes are being brought about. I agree also with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of access to intervention. Some changes have been made and the matter will be kept under review. I well understand the frustration that has been felt, but it is now being addressed.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on Monday, when he and I were on the shores of Loch Lomond, the veterans in attendance were in support of the Government's actions in Europe to protect the interests of beef producers in Scotland as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom? My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that the Government's tactics have the full support of my constituents.

Mr. Forsyth: I was delighted to see my hon. Friend on the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond, where he was joined by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell)—and it was a pleasant and non-political occasion. I am sure that most people in our country applaud my right hon. Friend's stance in standing up for the interests of British beef and British farmers. We take that stand with no relish but because we are determined to get justice in Europe for our farmers.

Mr. George Robertson: We too strongly want the ban on beef exports lifted and convincing measures put in place to eliminate completely bovine spongiform encephalopathy from the British herd, to build confidence in our beef industry. Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that, if the Government's position starts to have more to do with keeping the splinters of an internal argument in the Tory party together, the Government will not only lose the support of hon. Members in other parts of the House but damage, perhaps permanently, relations between this country and our trading partners in Europe—which would endanger countless thousands more jobs?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman might reflect on the fact that the ban was imposed by qualified majority voting. If the decision had required unanimity, the ban would not have been imposed. The hon. Gentleman and his party want more Community measures determined by qualified majority voting, rather than by unanimity. He should acknowledge that he and his party, with their particular policy on Europe, would give more power to Brussels. It is not terribly credible for the hon. Gentleman to complain about the consequences of decisions reached in Europe that are out of line with our national interests when his party is so determined to hand more power to the bureaucrats in Brussels.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware of a recent report from world veterinary surgeons meeting in Paris, stating that Europe has got it totally wrong in respect of BSE—and that, in going for a programme of culling, now Britain has got it wrong? Those experts were effectively saying that Britain took the correct steps in 1989-90 to correct the BSE situation. Does my right hon. Friend regret to some degree that we have been forced into a culling programme?

Mr. Forsyth: We have not agreed to any culling programme but have entered into discussions with the Community to have the ban—which, as my hon. Friend said, is completely unjustified—lifted. The World Health Organisation and our own Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which comprises a group of distinguished scientists, has spelt out the scientific position clearly. If the matter were driven by science and common sense, our farmers would be able to sell their beef to Europe, where they would find consumers willing to buy a quality product.

Contaminated Land

6. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources the Scottish Office has received from European Union organisations to assist with the treatment of contaminated land in each of the last three years. [30076]

Mr. Kynoch: The figure is £2.2 million since 1994.

Mr. McAvoy: I do not know whether the complacent Minister realises how his answer betrays the way that he is doing his job. My constituency, uniquely in Scotland, has toxic waste sites that require Government assistance to make safe and improve that part of Lanarkshire. The Minister and the Government have done nothing, while the European Union is ready to assist with money. Does the Minister agree that the money that he and his Government have obtained from the EU is disgraceful and reflects on the hon. Gentleman's competence and ability?

Mr. Kynoch: I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman has taken that tone because I answered the question simply by giving him the amount of money that has been spent. He will be well aware that he has raised this subject on previous occasions in Scottish questions and that we have given him the answer. That is that the local authorities and the Glasgow development agency have conducted studies into the position in Rutherglen, which have confirmed that there is a problem with hexavalent chromium on certain sites.

Equally, however, the local authority has commissioned a study by the university of Glasgow and the local health board into the health aspects. He will be aware—as I remember telling him this the last time he raised this question—that it has been ascertained that there is no health hazard because the chromium is well underground.

Scottish Enterprise is funding a research project, managed by the City of Glasgow council, to determine the most effective technical means to deal with contamination. If the hon. Gentleman believes that that is doing nothing to deal with the problem in this region, he is not looking at the facts. There is a problem, and it is being dealt with. Funding clearly involves a problem of priority and it is up to the local enterprise companies and local authorities to decide how to spend it.

Mr. Congdon: While resources for contaminated land are welcome, does my hon. Friend agree that we should not delude ourselves into believing that it is European money? As this country is a net contributor to European funds, it is paid for and funded by the British taxpayer.

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is right. All too often, however, Opposition Members are ignorant of where funding comes from. They keep talking not just about European funding, but government funding and they forget that that funding comes from taxpayers and that the Government have a responsibility to them to ensure that they get value for money. Opposition parties advocate increased taxes and less efficient and increased spending. That is where we differ markedly from those parties.

Mr. David Marshall: What percentage of contaminated land has been treated in Scotland in the past five years and when does the Minister expect all the contaminated land in Scotland to have been treated? At the present rate of progress, will it take five or 500 years?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the contamination problem is dealt with by Government policy on the "polluter pays" principle and that it is not possible, therefore, to ascertain exactly what has been spent on contamination, but if a polluter pollutes, it is his responsibility to clean it up.

Beef Industry

7. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on employment in the beef industry in Scotland. [30077]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Around 16,000 jobs in Scotland depend on the beef industry.

Mr. Home Robertson: Since the Scottish Office has comprehensive devolved powers over agriculture and food, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that his predecessor, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), could have taken steps to prevent BSE's spread into Scotland 10 years ago? Is it not a fact that an elected Scottish Administration would have been far more likely to take effective steps to protect 21,000 jobs, or the lower number of jobs that the right hon. Gentleman has just quoted, in the Scottish beef industry? Even now, why is this little Englander from Stirling aggravating our European partners, instead of taking steps to restore confidence in Scottish beef and our export markets?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that anyone would have taken whatever steps were possible to prevent BSE's spread, and the Government have always acted on the basis of scientific advice. I know that Opposition Members are in some disarray and feel desperation over their plans for a Scottish Parliament, but the hon. Gentleman's question must be the worst example of scratching around to try to find an argument for a Scottish Parliament that I have yet heard.

On Scotland's interest, from his knowledge of the industry, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have consulted on exempting from the 30-month rule the specialist, slow-maturing breeds and grass-fed cattle from herds that have not been infected with BSE. We hope to be able to make progress with that as we continue our constructive discussions within the Community.

I am sorry that we do not have the hon. Gentleman's support in standing up for Britain and refusing to co-operate within the Community until such time as, under Community rules, the access to the single market that we are guaranteed by treaty is given to our farmers—many of whom are struggling to survive, unlike the hon. Gentleman, who no doubt has plenty of fat to keep him going through the present crisis.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the compensation arrangements for those who have lost business or their jobs because of the BSE crisis are falling very unevenly? Does he also acknowledge that the firm of Donald Russell, which has already been mentioned—it is an export-led company—has laid off 34 workers who have, as yet, no prospect of compensation or re-employment? This matter also affects those who have been involved in the processing of head meat.

In those circumstances, will the right hon. Gentleman make representations to his Cabinet colleagues to ensure that compensation is made available equally and fairly to all who have suffered through no fault of their own?

Mr. Forsyth: I have considerable sympathy for the people concerned, but the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. We have never introduced a compensation scheme. What we have done is spend almost £1 billion on keeping the infrastructure of the beef market operating. We made it absolutely clear that we were providing money not for compensation, but to allow the infrastructure of the beef market to continue to operate. A large amount of that money was spent on reducing the backlog that was clogging up the abattoirs.

To compensate everyone for losses arising from the crisis would involve an enormous and quite unsustainable sum. People will suffer losses. The Government have tried to do everything possible to maintain the industry, which is important for employment, in operation in Scotland. I realise that that is an unpalatable message, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to commit his party to compensation, perhaps he should do his sums first.

Mrs. Liddell: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the problem of BSE and the consequent difficulties with employment are not helped by intemperate remarks from the Treasury Bench? There is a need for a serious and considered programme of action. The Opposition welcome the fact that it will soon be illegal for anyone to hold bone-in animal feed. We also welcome the fact that the Government are now starting a collection programme for such feed from farm and feed mills.

It would be of great value to the farming community to have information on the details of how collection is to operate. Farmers need that information rather more quickly than would be achieved under the interesting proposal, made by the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), for a newsletter. This is a critical issue that affects the industry.

Will the Secretary of State reconsider his opposition to the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and me for a serious inquiry into the circumstances in which 60 per cent. of beasts found to have BSE have come from beasts born after the ban was introduced? That is a helpful suggestion. It is

important to trace the origins of the meal so that there is a chance of identifying which feed mills have been distributing contaminated feed. That would provide us with an opportunity to isolate those areas that have had contaminated feed. I make those suggestions in a constructive manner.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of there not being intemperate remarks from the Treasury Bench, especially the shadow Treasury Bench. I exempt her from that, but the behaviour of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was absolutely disgraceful. Indeed, it contributed significantly to the problems that we now face.

On the hon. Lady's point about communications, I can confirm that my officials are in regular contact with the industry. There is an all-industry group, uniquely in Scotland, advising and working in partnership with the Scottish Office and the lines of communication are good. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries made a good suggestion for a newsletter to go to all farmers telling them what is happening. However, there are also means of direct communication on such important matters as the use of animal feed.

Education

8. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance is given to encourage children aged 16 years or over to stay on in full–time education. [30078]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): We are developing a new system of courses and assessment—"Higher Still"—to give all young people from age 16 the opportunity to stay on and gain relevant qualifications to the highest standard they can reach. Financial support is available in Scotland for this age group through child benefit of £40 million and, with bursaries and other allowances, to more than £91 million in total.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the staying-on rate has risen to an amazing 43 per cent. since the Government took over? What does he think would be the effect on the staying-on rate if the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) were ever to have the opportunity to put into effect his proposal to remove child benefit from this group of people?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the teenage tax proposed by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East would hit Scotland hardest of all parts of the United Kingdom. Because of the Government's outstanding success, more 16-year-olds opt to stay on in school in Scotland than in any other part of the land. Therefore, Scottish families would be hardest hit by that learning levy—that tax on learning.

Mr. Canavan: Did the Minister see the report in *The Herald* yesterday about the Scottish student who was forced to pay £20 a week to live in a broom cupboard under the stairs because he could not afford to pay a higher rent? Bearing it in mind that the maximum student grant is now only a fraction of what it was when Labour was in power, will the Government take urgent action to eradicate student poverty and to help build better opportunities for all our young people?

Mr. Robertson: Madam Speaker, it is for you to work out the procedures of the House, but, surely, during Question Time, we should now distinguish between new Labour and more traditional Labour, because what the hon. Gentleman has just said is not what the rest of his party is saying. He is talking about student grants, but Opposition Front Benchers want to abolish grants and ensure that students subsidise themselves and pay back grants over 20 years. He should know that, under our proposals and our system, grants and loans together now amount to more than they did when his party was last in government.

Lady Olga Maitland: As more children than ever before are sitting highers this summer with a view to going to university, does my hon. Friend agree that their hopes would be entirely dashed if they were penalised in the support that they receive to stay on in full-time education? Does he agree that the teenage tax would kill opportunity, whereas the Conservative party provides opportunity?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The proposal by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, the shadow Chancellor, is probably one of the most odious and obnoxious proposals to come from any shadow Chancellor.

Mr. George Robertson: May I tell the hon. Gentleman that Opposition Members passionately believe in encouraging children to stay on in full-time education? Does he realise that his half-baked—even sinister—plans for mandatory national testing will do nothing to keep young people in the education system? Does he realise that, by alienating parents and teachers with this hidden Thatcherite agenda for selection and for vouchers in schools, he offers no hope to young people who want to stay on in full-time education? Before the Government damage more irreparably the Scottish education system by trying to breathe some life into the Thatcherite corpse, will they think again and abandon their dangerous plans?

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) will take kindly to being called Thatcherite. He said:

> "It's absolutely vital that parents get as much information as possible. I certainly want that for my children; I want to know exactly how they're performing at school; I want to have a proper assessment of them."

Why is it right for the Leader of the Opposition to have those rights and that information, but it is not right for the hundreds of thousands of Scottish parents?

9. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of pupils remain at school over the age of 16 years in Scotland; and what is the United Kingdom average percentage. [30079]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In 1994-95, the age 16 staying-on rate in Scottish schools and equivalent course in further education colleges was 81 per cent. The closest comparison for the UK was 72 per cent.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that that major difference of between 9 and 10 percentage points shows that Scottish children would be disproportionately affected were there a teenage tax of £560 a head in lost child benefit? Would not that be devastating for teenage education in Scotland?

Mr. Robertson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. To abolish child benefit for pupils staying on for higher and further education would be equivalent to levying a tax increase of 5p in the pound on the average taxpayer with one child aged 16 to 18. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) says that Labour is only reviewing the proposal, but will he tell us whether he will be supporting or opposing it?

Mr. Davidson: Is the Minister aware that one source of income for families whose children are staying on at school is the higher school bursary? Is he further aware that, since the abolition of Strathclyde regional council, many authorities in the west of Scotland are, for financial reasons, unable to give bursaries to children who go outwith their own boundaries? In such circumstances, will the Minister consider providing additional finance for all authorities so that they can provide bursaries for children going outwith their area, or will he introduce legislation to make it compulsory for all children from any education authority to be treated equally, no matter whether they go outwith their authority's boundaries?

Mr. Robertson: We are now spending some £45 million on further education bursaries, which in real terms is 188 per cent. more than was spent in 1979. We spend some £6 million on school bursaries, which is 123 per cent. more than was spent under the previous Labour Government, so we will take no lectures on our support for bursaries.

Health Service and Local Government Funding

10. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the effects on public finances of making per capita funding from the Treasury for the health service and local government in Scotland the same as the average for England. [30080]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health and personal social services spending would fall by 20 per cent., and local government aggregate external finance grant by some 30 per cent., if funding was on the same per capita basis in Scotland as in England.

Mr. Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend thought that it might well be a winning policy in the rest of the United Kingdom to introduce a tartan tax to allow Scotland to have its independent tax-raising Parliament which would then raise taxes to pay for that extra funding? Has he made any estimate of just how much the tartan tax would have to be to pay for that additional spending in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: If I understand my hon. Friend's question correctly, he is asking how much we would have to raise through a tartan tax in order to make up for the additional expenditure that we enjoy in Scotland over and above what would be spent if we had the same level of spending in England. It would be about £3.5 billion. I think that 1p on income tax raises about £130 million, so my hon. Friend can work it out for himself. He began by asking whether I thought that it would be an election-winning strategy. From what I hear, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) considered the notion and decided that it certainly was not.

Mr. Dalyell: The Secretary of State will have no problem whatsoever understanding my question; it is very simple. What is the Scottish Office's notional figure per capita for the cost of local government reform?

Mr. Forsyth: I should be happy to give the hon. Gentleman an estimate, if not a notional figure, of the cost of local government reform, and I should be happy to write to him. There is one question that his colleagues seem to have difficulty understanding—it is the question that he used to ask repeatedly but which I understand he has now been prevented from asking; the famous West Lothian question.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a critical part of the spending differential between the health service and local government in Scotland are the funds that have been spent on care in the community? If the funds are not used properly, we end up with blocked-off beds in the health service and care in the community is starved of money. Does he agree that the inquiry currently being held on Tayside will help to unravel some of the ghastly aspects of this problem?

Mr. Forsyth: I cannot anticipate the results of the inquiry. Suffice it to say that Scotland enjoys considerably higher expenditure per head on health than they do in England. If we had a tax-raising Parliament, or indeed a Parliament without tax-raising powers, there is no doubt that that funding would be called into question. Opposition Members who support that change are putting at risk the funding of vital services.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Secretary of State admit that the comparison between a nation of 48 million people and one of 5 million or 6 million people scattered over a large area is not adequate to address per capita spending? Should not the needs of a scattered community, rather than that false comparison, be borne constantly in mind?

Mr. Forsyth: I certainly agree that it is important to take account of needs and the range of services. My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for local government, the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), has undertaken a study to find out why local government in Scotland spends about 45 per cent. more per head than local government in England. It will be interesting to see where the resources are going.

At present, our funding is determined by a formula, and not as a result of any needs assessment. The point that I was making to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was that setting up a Scottish Parliament would undoubtedly result in pressure from this House for some proper needs-based assessment of expenditure in Scotland. My advice to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) is that we should leave things as they are and not risk the changes that would result from the setting up of such a wind machine in Edinburgh.

Scottish Economic Council

11. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet the Scottish Economic Council to discuss trends in the Scottish economy. [30081]

Mr. Kynoch: On Friday 21 June.

Mr. Salmond: Has the Minister responsible for industry taken account of the comments of the president of the Scottish National Farmers Union yesterday and of the CBI today about the economic damage that could be done if the Government's beef war gets out of hand? Has the Secretary of State succeeded in persuading the rest of the Cabinet to adopt the same infantile attitude to Europe as he adopts? He has hardly succeeded in persuading the Scottish people, who have dumped the Tory party back to 12 per cent., as an opinion poll will show tomorrow. How many of the 70,000 jobs in Scotland that depend on European markets, the 50,000 that depend on inward investment and the 20,000 that depend on European tourism is the Minister prepared to jeopardise in pursuit of the Secretary of State's insulting and aggressive attitude to our European customers?

Mr. Kynoch: That is choice, coming from the hon. Gentleman, whose party seems intent on incorporating a European star even in its logo. He will be well aware of the significant impact that the unjustified and unscientific ban is having on north-east Scotland especially—on his constituents and mine. I have been in constant contact with my farming community, and my farmers are behind the Government's efforts to have the ban lifted. They want the market opened and confidence restored. They appreciate the moves that the Government have made. If the hon. Gentleman spent a little less time canoodling with his European partners and got his colleague, the Member of the European Parliament for Scotland North East, to fight on behalf of north-east Scotland's farmers, the farming community would be a lot better off.

Mr. Stewart: When he meets the Scottish Economic Council, will my hon. Friend discuss the impact of removing the present controls on business rates, as proposed by the Labour party? Business rates are an overhead for every company in Scotland. Would not such a policy be disastrous for investment and jobs?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is very experienced in such matters and knows perfectly well that business pleaded for many years for a level playing field on non-domestic rates. He will also be aware that the new chairman of the Glasgow chamber of commerce has said that it would be utter folly to return business rates to local government control. That would be a back-door increase in business taxation on top of a tartan tax, with its effects on Scottish business, and on top of the effect of the social chapter, the minimum wage, the teenage tax, the graduate tax and all the other proposals for increased taxation that would reduce the competitiveness of Scottish business if the Labour party ever took office.

Dr. Reid: The Minister is an expert on lecturing people about tax. Will he confirm that the extra taxes that the Government have inflicted on the Scottish people in the past two years have been equal to 7p in the pound? Working on the figures given only a few minutes ago by the Secretary of State showing that each penny of that represents £130 million in income, will he confirm that the Government now receive £910 million a year more from the Scottish people than they did two years ago? Why are services being cut and the fabric of society being destroyed if the Government are taking almost £1,000 million more from the Scottish people for that privilege?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman and his party talk about tax increases. They credit the Government with a tax increase that has been applied largely by the Labour party—this year's increase in council tax. The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand that central Government have increased funding to local government by 3.6 per cent., which is well in excess of inflation. He also does not understand the fact that Labour councils have increased council tax by an average of 13 per cent.—and sometimes much higher—which has had a damaging effect on services.

The Conservative party believes in trying to get value for money for the taxpayer, and so to increase competitiveness and attract more inward investment to areas such as his. Companies such as the Chunghwa Picture Tube Company, of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware, would not come to Scotland if they had to pay the increased taxation that is proposed by the Labour party.

Social Work Services/(Borders)

12. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the financial constraints in the provision of social work services in the Scottish borders; and if he will make a statement. [30082]

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: Scottish Borders council has been allocated substantial resources to meet the broad range of its social work responsibilities. In 1996-97, the council has £18.5 million in grant aided expenditure to social work—an increase of 2.5 per cent. on the previous year's allocation.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister accept, however, that the money allocated to the social work department of Scottish Borders council is inadequate to meet present need and demand? Is he aware that the externalisation of domestic care services, the reassessment of eligibility criteria and the increased charges for such services as Border care alarm are causing great heartache and concern and impacting badly on those most in need of help in south-east Scotland? Will he look again at the amount of money that is made available to the social work department of Scottish Borders council? Will he consider visiting my constituency to see just how difficult it is to make those savings in terms of the exercise that is now in hand and the potential damage that will occur unless the council can find more resources with which to do the job?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am happy to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Scottish Borders council has been allocated more than £14.5 million for its community care responsibilities in 1996-97—an increase of £0.5 million on the previous year. It is for local

authorities to choose their own priorities within the overall allocation. We believe that they should encourage the development of services appropriate to the particular needs of all the areas concerned.

Mr. Donohoe: Does the Minister accept that, if more resources had been made available to the social services, Maguire would not have been in a position to commit his crime because there would have been sufficient resources to address the problem? Should not the Minister and the Secretary of State accept some responsibility for the actions of Maguire and the murder of that young girl in Kilmarnock?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The answer is no. What happened in that particular case has absolutely nothing to do with social work expenditure. It concerns the circumstances that were before the court. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it quite clear that repeat sex offenders who carry out extremely dangerous acts should expect a life sentence once our proposed legislation becomes law.

Public Spending

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of public spending in Scotland is represented by taxation revenues for that country; and if he will make a statement. [30083]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Excluding the revenues from North sea oil, the proportion of public spending in Scotland represented by taxation revenue from Scotland is 72 per cent.

Mr. Winterton: As an English Member of the United Kingdom Parliament, I am perfectly happy that the people of Scotland should receive from the United Kingdom Exchequer £8.1 billion more in spending than they contribute in taxation, because of the great benefits that the Union brings to all the people of the United Kingdom. If there were to be a separate Parliament in Scotland with tax-raising powers, is it not inevitable that the influence of Scottish Members of Parliament in this place would be devalued and reduced, and the benefit that Scotland and its people get from being a member of the United Kingdom would be undermined and dramatically reduced to their disadvantage?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is quite right to say that expenditure in Scotland is £8.1 billion greater than revenues. Even if we include all the proceeds from North sea oil, the deficit is £7 billion. The Union is greater than the sum of its parts. We welcome the resources that Scotland receives from the United Kingdom, just as we welcome the partnership that we have with my hon. Friend and his constituents.

It is incumbent upon the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to work out their position on the matter. They must decide whether they agree with their Liberal Democrat partners in the Constitutional Convention, who say that there would have to be a reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament. They must decide whether they agree with the Liberal Democrats' assertion that the office of Secretary of State and Scotland's place in Cabinet would go.

We need answers to those questions because, as my hon. Friend said, the ability to argue Scotland's case in Cabinet and in this Chamber is central to the provision of resources for vital services. That is what Parliament is about, and the hon. Member for Hamilton is putting those services at risk by his foolish proposal that is more to do with his party's advantage than his country's interests.

Mr. Graham: The Secretary of State will be aware that people in Scotland pay taxes. Can I remind hon. Members that they are lounging on leather seats that were produced in my constituency by the Bridge of Weir leather tannery? The workers there make a tremendous contribution to this country through taxes, and they need support from the Government. They may lose their jobs because of the Government's mad, stupid and aggressive policies in Europe. It is time that the Government realised that some of the statements that they are now making could cost thousands of jobs throughout the country. It is time that they acted responsibly and did their business for the whole of Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: I think that I got the gist of the hon. Gentleman's question. The leather makers in his constituency are in a competitive business, as he knows. If they were ever unfortunate enough to get a Labour Government who set up a Parliament with tax-raising powers, their costs would increase, their marketing would be more difficult and jobs would be destroyed in that industry and many others in Scotland.

Nursing and Residential Homes

14. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to modify the regulations governing the ownership and management of privately owned nursing and residential homes for elderly people. [30084]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Legislation covering the registration and inspection of residential care and nursing homes is presently under review.

Dr. Godman: Has the unseemly delay in the publication of the report of the working group into this deeply troubling matter been orchestrated by those members of the group who represent the owners of private residential and nursing homes? Following Glen Glova and other scandals, no GP, lawyer or accountant should be allowed to own and/or manage a private home for the elderly. That scandal must be put to rest, and the report ought to see the light of day sooner rather than later.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can happily assure the hon. Gentleman that the report should be available to Ministers in three weeks' time, and I will come forward with our final recommendations for action with all possible speed. In the debate this morning, I outlined our likely response to some of the points under consideration.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Glen Glova. Quite properly, the working group has been considering the issue and the conflicts that arise from the registered person also being a resident's medical practitioner. It has also considered the assessment of persons with dementia by qualified persons who are independent of the proprietorship of the establishment. We will come forward with recommendations as soon as possible.

Education Budgets

15. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives from school boards to discuss local government education budgets. [30085]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the Scottish School Board Association on 1 April, but local government education budgets were not among the topics they asked to be put on the agenda.

Mrs. Michie: I think that the Minister should meet those representatives again soon, because school boards throughout Scotland, and particularly in my constituency, are struggling with budget cuts that mean that ordinary things such as the cleaning of windows and taking children to swimming pools cannot be done. In particular, will he meet school boards in Argyll and Bute, and that of Oban high school, where the building project that was supported by the Scottish Office has come to a dead halt? If he does not address those cuts in education, I believe that, very soon, everyone will say that local government reform has been an unmitigated disaster.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Lady talks about cuts, but in setting its budget, Argyll and Bute council has been able to increase its expenditure on services this year by £5.1 million, or almost 5 per cent. above the level that the former regional and district councils budgeted to spend last year. Therefore, although the hon. Lady is quite right to ask certain questions, she is asking the wrong person. She should ask her council what it is doing with the increased resources that are available to it.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I refer you to the 21st edition of "Erskine May", page 291, and the responsibilities for questions? The basic issue is that it is the duty of Ministers to answer questions on matters of ministerial responsibility. It is not the duty of Ministers, if one reads from "Erskine May" aright, to bring in all sorts of extraneous, tendentious matters to the answering questions, which actually demeans the House of Commons.

It is also relevant to mention that yesterday there was a Scottish debate. There were points of order that may have been brought to your attention, which have resulted in a serious letter to Sir Russell Hillhouse asking about the role of the civil service in preparing matters of a tendentious nature when introducing a Bill. Could I ask you, as Speaker, to reflect on the various submissions that have been made, and possibly to make a statement in your good time?

Madam Speaker: I will certainly look at the latter point that the hon. Gentleman has raised with me as soon as I can.

On his first point, I recognise that, over many years, Question Time has developed into a lively occasion, on which political points are scored. Of course, the primary purpose of Question Time is to hold the Executive to account. "Erskine May" says:

"Questions . . . should relate to the public affairs with which they"—

Ministers—

"are officially connected, to proceedings pending in Parliament, or to matters of administration for which they are responsible."

That is on page 285 if hon. Members would like to study it further.

Elsewhere, "Erskine May" says—I quote it for the benefit of those Members who put questions—

"The purpose of a question is to obtain information or press for action . . . it should not be in effect a short speech."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Members on all sides of the House are guilty of that. That quote appears on page 287.

As to answers and supplementary questions, I quote from page 295:

"An answer should be confined to the points contained in the question, with such explanation only as renders the answer intelligible, though a certain latitude is permitted to Ministers".

I ask the House to take my words seriously and to look at those sections of "Erskine May", so that all Government Departments will know my feelings about this matter and all Back Benchers will know that I feel that their questions are becoming long speeches. They should ask pertinent, brisk questions.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In contrast to the last point of order, I wonder whether I might raise with you a point of order about something that has affected the fabric of the House rather than its procedures. Some of us, when we went through the No Lobby—I appreciate that you may be unfamiliar, in the normal course of your day's events, with voting—

Madam Speaker: I spent a lot of my life going through the No Lobby.

Mr. Harris: But not last night, Madam Speaker.

Many of us were surprised, and not a little dismayed, to find what can only be described as a memorial to Nancy Astor in the No Lobby—

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Hideous.

Mr. Harris: As my hon. Friend says, it is hideous. I think that is a fair description of that memorial in the No Lobby, which has appeared apparently during the recess. I do not know whether you were consulted about this, but I wonder whether you would make inquiries about who authorised the erection of that memorial to Nancy Astor.

In raising this point of order, you will understand, I in no way detract from her achievement in becoming the first lady Member of the House to take her seat in the House—not to be elected: to take her seat—and one acknowledges that achievement, but I would put it to you that the No Lobby is a very inappropriate place for such a memorial, on two grounds.

First, quite apart from the aesthetic taste of that memorial, it is in the wrong position. If a memorial is to be erected, surely it should be where visitors to the House usually see it, apart from conducted tours. Secondly, I really do not think that we want the Lobbies of the House turned into a pale imitation of some of the aisles of Westminster abbey across the road, which are mausoleums with all sorts of memorials sprouting to all sorts of people.

I wonder whether you would kindly look at the matter as perhaps our landlord—or, indeed, our landlady—in this place. Would you use your influence to move it to a more appropriate setting?

Madam Speaker: The responsibility no doubt rests with me. I will certainly look into the matter. As far as I can recall, the bust of Lady Astor was commissioned by her family. The Works of Art Committee of the House determined where it should be put—in the No Lobby. The hon. Gentleman is quite incorrect when he says that the visitors do not see it. It is the No Lobby that visitors go through each morning before the House is open.

However, I take seriously the point raised by the hon. Gentleman, who does not normally raise frivolous points of order, and this is not a frivolous one. I will speak with those who are concerned about these matters to see what we can do, since it obviously offends some Members of the House.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Further to that point of order—

Madam Speaker: No; there can be no further points of order. I can only deal with it in the way that I have been asked to do by the hon. Gentleman. It is my responsibility; I will now deal with it.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Earlier today, you made a statement on questions, and of course we shall all be able to read your remarks in *Hansard* tomorrow. Might it not be a good idea to have printed, along with your remarks, the sections in Erskine May to which you referred, so that Members would have them readily to hand?

Madam Speaker: I will look at the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. I gave the page references, but if I can be more helpful, I will certainly do so.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Administration Committee gets the blame for moving Annie's Bar, and when some drunken journalists were a bit worried about that, they maligned hon. Members of the House. I would like to place it on record, as in a previous point of order, that that had nothing to do with the Admin Committee. I understand that the Arts Committee is an advisory committee.

Madam Speaker: That was not a genuine point of order. Of course the Administration Committee has nothing to do with it. I gave my word to the House that I am always finally responsible, and I will deal with the matter.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is a different point of order. It concerns the principle behind decisions such as that to put up what I think is a very good plaque—and it must be put somewhere. How is the House to be consulted about such decisions? I do not think that the House was aware that it was going to happen.

Madam Speaker: The House should have been aware that it was going to happen, because various hon. Members on both sides of the House sit on the Committees of the House. That is how the responsibility filters through.

Choice of Schools

3.39 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish in England a system for administering school admissions similar to that for administering university admissions so as to provide an independent and coordinated method for parents and guardians to choose nursery, primary and secondary schools for their children, and to appeal against any refusal of admission to schools; and for connected purposes.

I hope that this is a slightly less controversial matter. My Bill would establish in England a system of dealing with school admissions which, put simply, would be similar to that currently used for university admissions. It would relate to applications for nursery, primary and secondary schools. It would also deal with one point relating to appeals against refusal of admission.

So that nobody thinks that this Bill has other matters hidden behind it, I can tell the House that it would not create more selective schools or fewer selective schools, and it would not abolish existing selective schools or change the status of grant-maintained schools or city technology colleges. The Bill would not reduce or increase choice, and would not reverse the Greenwich judgments. It would not even ensure that hon. Members followed party policy when choosing schools for their families. Those are all perfectly proper matters for consideration, and I have strong views about all of them, but they are matters for another occasion.

The Bill also would not take away the greatly valued power that each school has within the law of establishing the criteria for its own admissions. It also would deal with a severe problem that arises under the current system. I hope that it would produce a system that worked better and which would be more honest, as well as producing fairer, better and speedier results.

There are four interrelated problems. First, many parents and children often fix their sights on one school and believe that by applying, pushing, hoping and praying, they will get in. Sometimes, too late, they realise that they cannot gain admission to that school, and that any other school they might have wanted has filled its roll.

Secondly, the administration for dealing with school applications is something that many parents find difficult because it is so inconsistent. For example, when parents in my borough make an application to a school—it may be the school of which I am the chair of governors—they will be advised by the head teacher to make applications to other schools. They might not do so, or they might do so later. There will be different dates for applications to different schools, and there will be different forms in the different schools. There will be different criteria, and some may interview. It is a nightmare for parents to get round the circuit, even if they want to go round the circuit at all.

Thirdly—this is perhaps the most serious issue—many parents, head teachers and staff arrive at the end of the summer term with several children having nowhere to go. I have been to many school-leaving events at which the head teacher has said in formal remarks, "Mr. Hughes, please help us, because we still have three 11-year-olds without a place." Nothing is more depressing for those children or their parents as they are leaving their primary school than to be surrounded by others who all have somewhere to go. That is in addition to children who have had an offer with which they are not happy. I will also deal with that.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Fourthly, in some schools there is no guaranteed independent appeals system. I see the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on the Treasury Bench, and I am grateful to her for attending. In answer to a written question about the proportion of primary and secondary school children in England who gained admission to their school of first choice in 1994-95, she said—I accept the theory—

"This information is not collected centrally. Surveys commissioned by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in 1992 and by *The Times* in 1993 suggested that some 90 per cent. of parents gained a place at their first choice school."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. *221*.]

I am not in a position to quibble with those figures, but if that is right, then 10 per cent. are unhappy and, if that is the national average, then in some parts of the country, the number of those who do not gain admission to their first choice school will be much greater.

From my experience—I have spoken to colleagues on both sides of the House—in London and other urban areas where people may live near local authority boundaries and where many cross-boundary issues may arise, considerably more than 10 per cent. do not get into the school of their first choice. That does not mean, of course, that that 10 per cent. obtain a place at the school of their second choice. They may not obtain a place at the school of their second, third or fourth choice, and that problem raises big questions.

At this time of the year, this issue is probably the second most common problem raised at my surgeries. This morning, I signed 10 letters to schools on behalf of parents in my constituency. Heads have raised the issue with me every year since I was elected. I checked last might with the head teacher of the school for which I am chair of the governors—St. James's Church of England primary school in Bermondsey. Mrs. Robinson, the head, said—I am using her words—that the current system is awful, far worse at the secondary stage, a nightmare and a system gone potty. That is the opinion of a senior primary school head who knows the system well.

Our school has a good system, and we interview all the parents, and also explain that they should apply to other schools. Even so, at the end of the final year in primary school, many children do not have a place. I accept that part of the problem may arise because parents fail to understand that they have to exercise a choice, but it is untrue to say—and we should be honest with people—that there is a freedom of choice of school. That is not true in this country. There is only a freedom of choice of a school if supply is greater than demand at that school, and the children meet its criteria. Parents can choose a school, but they may not get the school of their choice. We should be honest, as we are with people who apply to universities. Applicants make a list, and they may get their first, second or third choice, or they may not.

The present system does not serve children, parents or schools well. In collaboration with colleagues on both sides of the House, we should consider a system for all publicly funded nursery, primary and secondary schools, whatever their status and whether they are local authority schools or church schools, grant-maintained schools or CTCs. The system should have a standard form, with, say, five choices, which parents must submit by a certain date, fixed in advance. The scheme would be administered centrally, or locally by local authorities—the location is not important—and parents would be allowed to hold only one place. Some children are not offered places because other parents hold places that they never intend their children to take.

The criteria for admission would be given to parents from the start, as for university admission, and a clearing system would operate at the end. That would allow the system to work across local authorities, because parents might want to apply to three schools in their borough and two in other boroughs, or to some local authority schools and some Church schools.

The system would establish a common starting time, and each of the choices could be dealt with in turn, so that the clearing system could start in July. Parents would also be offered counselling and support. We must deal with the differing standard of application forms, because some have adequate information and some do not—I have checked with heads and staff that that is so—and we must try for the best practice.

I stand to be corrected, but I believe that only city technology colleges have no independent right of appeal on admission decisions. I am trying to persuade the city technology college in my constituency—Bacon's Church of England CTC—to introduce an independent right of appeal. One of the Minister's predecessors nearly conceded that such a right should be enshrined in legislation. It is important for parents who do not get a place for their children at the school of their choice to know that somebody entirely independent adjudicates on the decision. One secondary school in my constituency has a waiting list of 180, and the competition for places in some schools is very fierce.

Little can be more sad, more unfair or more undermining for 11-year-old youngsters, their parents and the parents of five-year-olds than not to obtain a place at the school of their choice, to which their mates and their peer group are going. It is most oppressive if, at the end of the last year before school admission, children do not have a place at any school at all. I hope that the House finds the Bill acceptable, and that I may be given leave to introduce it.

3.49 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, Madam Speaker.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has elucidated a serious problem, of which no hon. Member can be unaware because we encounter it in our lives and in those of our children—and, as the hon. Gentleman said, in our advice bureaux, where we encounter the enormous pressure and heartbreak of those who attend.

The hon. Gentleman's idea is a Liberal party one, which sounds better the less one examines it. How could it possibly be an advantage to nationalise the appeal system? What would be achieved by that? How could a national body lay down criteria that would help in his constituency or in mine?

One of the problems about first schools in my constituency is the priority roads scheme. It is difficult for the local authority to solve such problems, and I am not attacking it, but, if Harrow council cannot get the priority roads scheme right in Pinner, how could a national body do it? Getting that right is the solution to the problem of overcrowding in some of the schools in my constituency.

The hon. Member said that he did not mind whether the system was administered locally or nationally, but how could it possibly make rules that would be suitable for the very different areas that hon. Members represent? The hon. Gentleman's motion contains the word "independent". That sounds good, but increased independence for the appeals system can have real meaning only in the context of its effect on an individual over-subscribed school.

There is an independent appeals system, certainly in the borough of Harrow, and no doubt in the borough of Southwark. But the problems that the hon. Gentleman mentioned related to the inadequacies of the system that is run by Southwark. Southwark should put that right, and not a word he said about changing the framework of the structure would be solve any of those problems. It has to be done much more locally. The Bill is a curious policy move by a party that pays lip service to local autonomy. There is no doubt that the proposed legislation would be costly, bureaucratic and unworkable in practice.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey spoke about choice, so let us examine what the Liberal party means by that. Its education spokesman, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who is in his place, wants to remove the right of parents to choose religious grant-aided schools.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): No.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman says no in the Chamber, but he says yes outside. As usual, the Liberals are trying to have it both ways.

They want to remove powers from schools and give them to councils, but I would prefer the powers to stay with the schools. They want to remove the right to choose grant-maintained schools, and they are firmly against city technology colleges. However, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey speaks with pride about the CTC in his constituency. Liberal Members must decide whether they are in favour of them or against them. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can take the same view locally as his party takes nationally.

Liberals want to destroy the choice that is provided to poorer families by the assisted places scheme. They have made a specific pledge to take that away, despite the effect that that would have on the 80 per cent. of recipient families on lower than average incomes.

Perhaps Labour Members support the Bill. We all know about Labour and choice. I have a list running to two pages of Labour spokesmen who know all about choice for their own children but do not seem to know much about choice for anybody else. I support those Labour spokesmen who have done the best for their children and have made choices—whether of public, independent, grant-maintained or grammar schools or schools on the other side of London or in any other conurbation.

I support what they are doing, because they are doing the right thing as parents, and they should be protected from the wrath of members of the real Labour party who have ganged up on them and said the nastiest things possible. *[Interruption.]* Oh—they have not? Well I could, of course, if I had time, list the two pages of quotes from Labour Members and, indeed, councils run by the Labour party, against those Members.

My criticism is with the policy. Because Labour Members know all about choice for their own children, understand the value of choice and wish to exercise that right as parents, how can they possibly support policies that would take that choice away from their constituents? How can they do that when they know that it is something they want to exercise for themselves?

Perhaps the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Opposition spokesman on education, summed it up when he said:

> "I am having no truck with middle class left-wing parents who preach one thing, and send their children to another school outside the area."

I know the effect that that has had on parents in west London, where I live, who wish to send their children to the London Oratory school—a linked school. Parents in west London are extremely angry that people from the other side of London have made it a popular school and managed to send their children there, denying the opportunity for local parents to do the same. That is a fact. It is also a fact that local Labour Members of Parliament have not lifted a finger to help those parents.

Perhaps it was also summed up by one of the Labour "luvvies" with whom I had the pleasure of having lunch a few years ago—a prominent supporter of the Labour party, who wanted all the choice, all the public schools, swept away. When I said, "But didn't you send your children to public school?" I was told, "We would have sent our children to school in Switzerland, so it would have been all right for us." That is the reality of Labour Members: choice for themselves but not for other people.

The Labour party, if it chose to support the Bill, would have to explain its record in power, a period when it had a very bad effect on education, supported as it was by the Liberals. When Labour and the Liberals were in power, spending on education fell by £1.6 billion. Spending as a percentage of gross domestic product fell by one percentage point. Spending on universities fell by 12.6 per cent. in real terms. The number of full-time students in higher education fell, and teachers' pay rose by only 6 per cent. in real terms—a fifth of the rise under my party in power.

That is Labour and the Liberals on education: not a candy-floss pretence that they want choice. What they mean is "choice for us, but none for other people." If hon. Members want choice, they will reject the Bill, and vote for the Conservatives to give them choice in education.

I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 34, Noes 40.

Division No. 136] **[3.58 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Beggs, Roy	Chidgey, David
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes	Cohen, Harry

Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris Littleborough
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lewis, Terry
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCrea, The Reverend William
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Ms Liz Lynne.

NOES

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Whittingdale, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Lady Olga Maitland and Mr. Bob Dunn.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Housing Benefit

4.8 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I beg to move,

That the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 965), dated 28th March 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 2nd April, be revoked.

There are two main provisions in the regulations, both of which could have a devastating effect on young people's ability to live in safe, sound and affordable rented accommodation. They may be summarised as follows. First, the regulations laid before Parliament on 2 April 1996 restrict housing benefit payments for single people under the age of 25. To be specific, that involves restricting full housing benefits payable to single people under the age of 25 to the average cost of shared housing—known as the single room rent—in any given locality. Local authority and housing association accommodation is exempt from the restrictions.

The proposals will severely affect all new and change of address claims made on or after 7 October 1996, and existing claims assessed under arrangements since 2 January 1996, from the first benefit review date on or after 7 October 1996. The single room rent will become the maximum limit for housing benefit payable to a young single person. It will be determined by rent officers as the average cost of shared accommodation in the local area. Local authorities will have the discretion to pay rents above the single room rent in cases of "exceptional hardship", but the subsidy available will be subject to an overall cash limit determined by central Government.

Some groups of people will be exempt from the proposed restrictions. Following the consultation exercise after the original draft regulations were laid, two further groups of people have been included in the exempt list—first, some care leavers, but not including care leavers in Scotland, and in any case only young people subject to care orders, and even then only until their 22nd birthdays; secondly, all young people living in housing association properties.

The second key component of the regulations is the changes in payment arrangements for housing benefit for all new claims from 7 October 1996. Those changes will mean, first, the shifting from payment of benefit in advance to payment in arrears; secondly, that direct payments to landlords will be paid four-weekly or monthly; thirdly, that local authorities will have discretion to make first payments of benefit payable directly to the landlord. We believe that all those changes will add considerably to the problems faced by young people seeking rented accommodation.

Let us consider the two sets of proposals before us. First, there is the ceiling for single people under 25 years of age. The proposals in the regulations to restrict benefit rights have to be seen against the background of the severe restrictions on housing benefit entitlement in the private rented sector that have already been in effect from January 1996.

Those draconian measures include a mandatory limit on benefit levels based on a comparison with average rents for the type of accommodation and known as the

local reference rents; a removal of the previously existing protection from benefit restrictions for vulnerable groups such as the disabled, the elderly and families with children; and a very narrow cash-limited discretionary power for local authorities to pay higher levels of benefit in cases of exceptional hardship.

The result is that many people making claims since January 1996 have found that their housing benefit entitlement falls far short of the rents they have to pay. There is already evidence that that is causing severe hardship and leading to many people losing their homes.

The further restrictions on housing benefits for single people under 25 must be seen and judged against the background of the changes that have already been introduced.

How do the Government attempt to justify these further changes? From their statements, they seem to be making several arguments. First, they claim that the number of young people living independently has grown over the past 15 years and is projected to continue to grow. Secondly, they claim that young people who live independently expect to live in accommodation at the cheaper end of the market—usually in bed-sits, or in rooms in shared accommodation. Thirdly, they claim that most young people have comparatively low incomes, and that housing benefit should not assist young people to meet rents for larger accommodation, as that would act as a disincentive to find work and to come off benefit. Fourthly, they seem to argue that housing benefit should not act as an incentive for young people to leave the parental home.

I think that it is worth considering each of those contentions. First, absolutely no evidence has been presented to support the Government's contention that most young people living independently are not in self-contained accommodation, or that young people on housing benefit are any more or less likely to take on unnecessarily large or expensive accommodation. Although the Government estimate that 144,000 out of the 177,000 young people on housing benefit in the private sector will suffer benefit cuts from these measures, no evidence has been presented to support the view that those young people are occupying overly large accommodation. I should be grateful if the Minister will today present the House with the evidence on which that contention is based.

Secondly, the Government's case that young people have lower incomes is certainly true in respect of those who are claiming benefit. Since the introduction of income support in 1988, single people under the age of 25 have been paid at a lower rate of income support—amounting to a shortfall of about £10 a week—with a correspondingly lower level of housing benefit for those not on income support. So there is already a financial imperative for single people under 25 to occupy accommodation at the cheaper end of the market.

Under these proposals, many young people will suffer the double disadvantage of a cut in their housing benefit, leaving potentially large rent payments to be made up out of an already reduced income support level. As the Government's Social Security Advisory Committee commented in its report on the draft regulations, that situation could lead to young people being

"harassed by landlords because of rent arrears, leading to possible eviction and homelessness."

The Social Security Advisory Committee also registered its concern at the lack of any evidence about the living situation of young people to back up these cuts, and about the perceived use by young people of housing benefit to pay for unnecessarily expensive accommodation. The Government have not cited any such evidence, and I again call on the Minister to put before the House today the evidence on which that contention is based.

Thirdly, the Government's concern that housing benefit should not act as an encouragement to young people to leave home, and that it should not enable them to take accommodation that their contemporaries not on benefit would not be able to afford, is of central importance in these changes. Again, however, no evidence has been presented to support either of those concerns. The regulations seem to be based on the view, first, that young people under 25 ought to live with their parents, and, secondly, that such young people should not live in self-contained accommodation.

In response to those views, the Social Security Advisory Committee commented:

"young adults have the same general preference for independent living and self-contained accommodation as the rest of the population."

The Government have clearly encouraged that for owner-occupiers, 850,000 of whom are now young people under 25.

The Social Security Advisory Committee also concluded:

"We consider that the proposal is unlikely to have any significant impact on persuading young people to remain with their parents. If it does succeed to any extent it will make people less mobile . . . Many have legitimate reasons for leaving the parental home, while many do not have the choice to return to one."

We support those conclusions, and we further believe that the restrictions on benefit levels are likely to make it harder for young people who need or choose to live independently to find affordable accommodation, and to act as a disincentive for those who do not have accommodation to risk moving for work or for other reasons.

The Government have said that they are concerned about incentives to take work, but the restrictions are likely to act as a strong disincentive for young people, especially those on benefit since January 1996 and so protected from these changes, to change their circumstances by taking work or moving to find work, for fear of not being able to afford the rent if they subsequently have to claim benefit again.

Surely the Government should be encouraging young people to take jobs and look for job opportunities rather than establishing in the proposals a further barrier in the benefit system to their moving to seek the work they so desperately need. Will the Minister explain why the proposals have been set up so as to provide a further barrier to job opportunities?

Imposing a new ceiling on housing benefit for young people is likely to force them into poorer accommodation, always assuming that the supply of shared accommodation increases to make it available. Once again, the Social Security Advisory Committee commented on that contention:

"There appears to be no firm foundation for the Department's assessment that the market for private rented accommodation is sufficiently flexible to respond positively to the new ceiling by providing more, inexpensive, shared accommodation."

Again, we share that view. We share the concern that the response of landlords is likely to be to withdraw from providing accommodation for young people.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

In addition, the proposals seem to fly in the face of the tremendous efforts across the country by local authorities—I pay tribute to my own in Manchester in this respect—which have vigorously tackled the wide range of problems associated with houses in multiple occupation. Authorities have been working with landlords and often forcing them to convert accommodation into single units, thus providing a decent supply of affordable, safe and sound accommodation for single people.

The policy tries to reverse that trend, a view supported by the National Association of Estate Agents, which, in its response to the draft regulations, said:

"It is also, in the opinion of a number of our members, going to create an impossible position as the availability of shared accommodation is on the decline as many landlords have over the past few years been busy converting these type of HMOs into self-contained units. As such, these units will command higher rentals and, therefore, any assessment based on bedsit accommodation with shared facilities made by rent officers will make it nigh impossible for the under 25s to rent this type of accommodation if it is not there to be had."

Surely the Government should recognise the problem and seek to ensure a supply of affordable and safe accommodation for young people.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Does that not show how the housing benefit system has distorted the accommodation available on the marketplace in terms of over-emphasis on quality? It is not right that young people should expect the taxpayer automatically to fund self-contained accommodation for them, come what may. Most citizens expect young people to look for jobs before they enjoy such luxuries.

Mr. Bradley: It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman suggests that quality accommodation should not be the norm. Presumably he wants low-grade accommodation and little provision of basic facilities for our young people. That view is not shared by many organisations that represent housing groups, or even estate agents, who perhaps should want taxpayers' money to be involved. Clearly the hon. Gentleman does not understand the conditions to be found in many houses in multiple occupation. Forcing young people to live in such conditions is quite scandalous.

It is important to make four further crucial points. First, the Government claim that the changes will save £65 million a year, but they do not seem to have costed spending to deal with the subsequent rise in homelessness, and the further cost of administering the new regulations coupled with the changes that were made to the regulations in January. Will the Minister provide the net cost of those proposals, taking into account the factors that I have just identified?

Secondly, I turn to discretionary payments to vulnerable people. The discretion to pay above single-room rent will be cash-limited. Local authorities simply cannot exercise discretion properly when they are expected to do so within the confines of a cash-limited budget. For example, a single person under the age of 25 who applies for a discretionary payment in, say, December of this year may be successful, but someone in identical circumstances who applies in, say, February next year could be unsuccessful, on the sole ground that the cash-limited budget has already been spent.

We have ample experience of the way in which people are treated unfairly under the social fund. People in identical circumstances are not receiving help when it is desperately needed. Will the Minister comment on the cash-limited budget for discretionary payments?

Thirdly, I turn to exemptions. The Opposition believe that the safeguards built into the regulations are wholly inadequate. I should like to return, as I said I would, to care leavers. As I understand the regulations, only care leavers who have been subject to care orders under the Children Act 1989 will receive exemption from the proposals—but, even then, only until their 22nd birthday. Young people who are looked after voluntarily or following agreement with parents are not to be exempt from the changes for any period.

In March 1994, of the 45,200 young people looked after by local authorities, 53 per cent., or 24,400, were subject to care orders, whereas 20,800, or 47 per cent., were accommodated but not subject to such care orders. The source of that information is the Children Act 1994. The trend is that the number of people accommodated but not subject to care orders makes up an increasing proportion of all young people in the care system.

Scottish care leavers will have no such exemptions, as the Children Act applies only to England and Wales, and the regulations exempt only care leavers who are subject to an order under the Act. The Government have so far given no explanation of why care leavers in Scotland and the other group I have identified should be treated more harshly. Will the Minister confirm my interpretation of the regulations, and if it is correct, explain why it does not apply in the way I have described?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): To supplement my hon. Friend's point, we have received representations from Glasgow Women's Aid, which is absolutely desperate about the matter, especially since Strathclyde region, which was extremely helpful, has been dismantled. I shall give the documents to the Government for their comment.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing the point, and look forward to the Minister's response to the problem.

Time is short, so I shall make my fourth point briefly. It relates to the Government's policy on non-dependant deductions, which seems contradictory to the regulations. I obtained figures from the Library that showed—it is complicated because of the different income bands—that, on average, there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the non-dependant deduction, but, at the same time, only about a 9 to 11 per cent. increase in the income bands to which the deduction applies.

That would seem to encourage young people to leave the parental home because there is an imposition through the benefits system on non-dependants who remain within the family home, but the Government's stated rationale is to stop young people leaving the parental home. I should be grateful if the Minister could explain the apparent contradiction between the two policies—between non-dependant deductions and the proposals before the House.

I turn now, briefly, to the other key changes to the housing benefit system in respect of future payments. Although it could be argued that the proposed changes are

merely technical and will not have a substantial effect, we believe that many claimants will be seriously disadvantaged.

The Government's reason for the changes is primarily to avoid overpayments. Although that may occur, it is important to stress that housing benefits payments are made only two weeks in advance, so there is only limited scope for overpayments as a result of payments in advance. However, the negative effects on claimants of a shift to payments in arrears may well be serious.

Most landlords require rent to be paid in advance. Therefore, it is reasonable that housing benefit should be paid in advance. At the start of a tenancy, claimants are often faced with demands for a deposit and a month's rent in advance. There is no provision in the benefits system for deposits, and only limited provision for loans for rent in advance from the social fund. If claimants have to wait longer for their first housing benefit payment, it will be even more difficult for claimants to gain tenancies, and landlords will become more reluctant to grant tenancies to housing benefit claimants. I would welcome the Minister's comments on that point.

Many organisations are concerned about the shift to payment in arrears, coupling it with the shortfalls in rent caused by the January 1996 benefit cuts and the proposals in the Housing Bill to reduce the period of rent arrears that justifies a possession order from 13 weeks to merely eight weeks. That may cause great hardship and insecurity for families and single claimants in private rented accommodation.

We believe that the draconian regulations to restrict housing benefit to single people under 25 further constitutes a form of age discrimination within the means-tested benefits system, and is likely to force young people into unsuitable housing and lead to an increase in youth homelessness.

The Government have refused to accept the main recommendation of the Social Security Advisory Committee that

"the proposal should not be implemented in its present form."

We agree with that, and with the SSAC's devastating conclusion that

"the consequence of the proposals could well be that some people dependant on benefits will face a choice between homelessness and living in accommodation of an unacceptably poor standard."

That is why we prayed against the regulations, and that is why we will vote against them tonight.

4.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): We now know that Labour's considered position is that the regulations are draconian and age discriminatory. The Labour Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), has invited his hon. Friends to vote them down. I am disappointed to hear that, as the Opposition have made no alternative suggestion as to what should be done to restrain the growth in housing benefit or as to what the alternative possibilities in their minds might be.

I have in mind the observation in *The Times* on 18 May, when the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was reported to have

"emphasised his message to Shadow Cabinet colleagues that they must make no spending commitments before finding savings."

If the regulations do not take effect, there will be costs, to which I shall return later, but we are debating whether they are appropriate measures in their own terms. I appreciate that that is what primarily concerns the House, but the country will be interested in the political point as to exactly what Labour's spending proposals are.

There is a pressing need to tackle the rising costs of housing benefit and the abuse of public funds which, unhappily, has been associated with it. The housing benefit bill stands at more than £11 billion a year, and a significant part of that is spent needlessly and wastefully.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The Minister expresses concern about the abuse of public funds. Does the Department of Social Security ever talk to the Department of the Environment? While his Department is proposing these measures, which will increase poverty, homelessness and unemployment—as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) so eloquently explained—the DOE is proposing nearly to double the amount of financial work that is to be exposed to competition. How will farming out the administration of housing benefit to private agencies assist the DSS in what ought to be its crusade to root out fraud? How will that assist the DSS in its duty to ensure that housing benefit is properly paid on time?

Mr. Evans: I am interested in all those points, most of which do not arise from the regulations. However, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Departments do talk to each other, as he well appreciates. The measures to which he referred, which deal with the administration of housing benefit, are designed to promote efficiency and to save money.

The hon. Member for Withington made some detailed points on two parts of the regulations. First, he referred to young persons under 25 years of age who are single and have no children. The Government considered what should be done, and the basis of our argument is fundamentally this: that single people under 25 without children and in employment are not normally in a position to afford expensive self-contained accommodation. They have not yet reached the point in their earnings career where they have made enough to justify such expenditure. Undoubtedly, the odd yuppie might be in a different position, but the vast majority of young people who are in work do not expect to rent separate accommodation. They muck in with their friends and share accommodation, as that is the ordinary thing to do.

Under the housing benefit arrangements that applied previously, there was a perceived unfairness that an unemployed person on housing benefit would be treated in exactly the same way as someone who was very much older and who had different expectations. Our principal argument is that the previous arrangements were a disincentive and were unfair.

Mr. Bradley: How many young people under 25 are in shared accommodation and how many are in single-unit accommodation?

Mr. Evans: There is statistical evidence of one sort or another that gives a general impression of such a factor,

[Mr. Evans]

but this is a point of principle. The arrangements were wrong in principle and we do not believe that they should continue and, accordingly, the statutory instrument was laid.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: If there are no young people on housing benefit in self-contained accommodation at excessive rent levels, this modest measure is not likely to have the detrimental effect that Opposition Front Benchers anticipate. But if there are, the measure is necessary.

In his response to my intervention, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley)—on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition—implied that every young person had a right to self-contained accommodation, whatever his means and circumstances and, if necessary, at public expense. How much would that cost?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct on that second point, and that is the ineluctable logic of what has been contended for by those on the Opposition Front Bench. We do not believe that to be right and we do not believe that the taxpayer believes it to be right. I should make it clear that there are a large number in the category of people who are single, under 25 and childless, who are in receipt of housing benefit—according to the 1994 figures, there were 177,000 of them and the cost was just under £500 million. We are talking about a large sum, which was growing and which should be diminished, as the instrument provides.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the Minister tell us how many under-25s have mortgages on which they get mortgage tax relief? Will the next proposal from his Government be to withdraw that mortgage tax relief?

Mr. Evans: I am interested in that statement; I wonder whether those on the Labour Front Bench will adopt it. Those who are paying mortgages are working and earning and they are entitled to the fruits of their prosperity. We are debating whether welfare payments are properly targeted by providing for under-25s who are unemployed self-contained accommodation that such people would not expect to afford if they were in work. That is the point of principle, and that is why we have introduced the measure.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The Scottish National party opposes the measure in principle. I fear that the Minister is about to add an unfairness to an unfairness as he applies exemptions to young persons leaving care, given the different scheme and arrangements in Scotland. What will he do to rectify that anomaly?

Mr. Evans: I shall come to those exemptions in order, but I can anticipate my remarks and offer some reassurance. We shall be laying amended regulations before the instrument comes into force, to deal with the Scottish position. I shall explain why that was necessary and why it has been done in that fashion. The hon. Gentleman's concern, which was also expressed by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who intervened on the hon. Member for Withington, is valid. It is important to get the arrangements for Scotland right, and I shall explain the difficulties in a moment.

Before I refer to the specific exemptions, I should like to complete my analysis of the principles behind the regulations. We do not anticipate that the type of accommodation that we are talking about will not be available. There is a fundamental point, which I am sure my hon. Friends believe in as a matter of principle—demand creates its own supply in a free market. The number of households in the independent private rented sector, which for the first time since 1919 the Government have deregulated and in which they have created opportunity, has increased significantly, by about 350,000, in the past six years. That is an extremely important achievement, and that market will continue to grow as long as the Government's policies continue.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): When the Secretary of State appeared before the Select Committee on Social Security, he doubted whether we have a free market in housing in some areas because of the size of the housing benefit bill.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the housing benefit bill and the payment of that benefit prior to the regulations had perverse effects occasionally, which contradicted a free market. As a simple, directly relevant example, if one was young, under 25, single and without children, one might as well have got a seaside flat in one of our coastal resorts. Such was one of the incentives until we introduced the regulations.

I accept that, for all sorts of reasons other than the subject of today's debate—for example, planning controls and other policies involving rent arrangements—the housing market is not a perfect free market. We accept as a matter of principle, however, that a free market of the nature that we have will produce the supply talked about.

Mr. Field: The Minister has just said that demand creates its own supply, but only if one has a free market. Surely the Minister has a duty to establish that free market if he believes that that philosophy will work.

Mr. Evans: We have been steadily and successfully achieving that objective in the past 18 years, and will continue to do so. I do not suggest for a moment that the objective has been entirely accomplished, but we intend that it shall be.

I should like to deal with the specific, necessary exemptions. It is not true to say that no consideration was given to young people who might need extra help. We have made a number of specific exemptions to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected from the change. It is important for the record that they should be spelt out. Persons needing care, support or supervision are wholly exempted, provided that their landlord is either a housing association, a registered charity or a voluntary organisation.

Mr. Field: If we are trying to protect those coming from care, why are just those particular groups exempted? Do we fear that private landlords would be exploitative?

Mr. Evans: I have indulged the hon. Gentleman several times, and each time he has simply moved on to the subject of my next paragraph. I shall explain this point at length, because the issue of people leaving care is extremely important. I shall explain it in two parts.

As the hon. Member for Withington pointed out, the instrument before us states at regulation 2(b):

"who has ceased to be the subject of a care order pursuant to section 31(1)(a) of the Children Act 1989".

Two points arise from that. The first and major point is that it does not apply in Scotland. Secondly, as the hon. Member for Withington said, it does not cover all those who have had contact with local authorities under the broader provisions of the Children Act 1989. The hon. Gentleman quoted figures, with which I respectfully agree. There is a wider category.

I shall first discuss Scotland and then return to care orders. The problem in Scotland is that the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 introduced a very different regime from that appertaining in England for dealing with local authority powers over children, one of its aspects being that people who have been subject to courts and arrangements of that sort are dealt with similarly to those who have been taken into care in England for social reasons. There is no obvious easy way of drawing the line, and I am afraid that we were unable to achieve a happy resolution of the matter at the time when the regulations were laid, but work is continuing and I assure the House that we shall make provision for Scotland similar to that which is made for England, in time for the coming into effect of the regulations in the autumn.

Unhappily, the matter is made more complicated by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, passed by the present Parliament, which sweeps away the older arrangements of the 1968 Act in Scotland. Some parts of the 1995 Act are already in force, but as far as this instrument is concerned, the relevant parts are not yet in force, and I understand that they are not expected to come into force until April 1997. That is a matter of importance. We shall sort it out.

Mr. Dalyell: Briefly, all I ask is that, in this consideration, specific reference be made to the concerns of Glasgow Women's Aid and Women's Aid throughout Scotland about legislation being amended, so that they can continue to be paid weekly. I shall give the Minister the papers. If he gives me the assurance, I shall not interrupt again.

Mr. Evans: I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I shall carefully look into that matter. We propose to make provision specifically for Scotland as soon as we can, and in any event before 7 October.

Mr. Welsh: I welcome the Minister's assurance and hope that he can deliver the goods when the time comes, but I am concerned that this situation arose in the first place. Why was it not noticed that Scotland was in a different position? Scottish Members of Parliament have a right to ask that, because we have specific legislation. Was it simply an oversight? Why did that situation arise?

Mr. Evans: It was not an oversight—we do not overlook Scotland, but it is difficult to fit the pattern of the English and Scottish legislation together so that a convenient dividing line can be drawn, which achieves what we wish to achieve. We shall do what we can to sort that out, and we intend to lay regulations to amend the position for Scotland.

A second issue, connected with the Scottish issue, is whether, in England, we have drawn the legislation too narrowly in respect of specific care orders. I have listened to the representations made to the House this afternoon. Other representations have been made to us. I give an assurance that we shall go away and reconsider that aspect as well.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim) *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I shall give way to deal with Northern Ireland as well, if I am asked to.

Mr. Forsythe: What consultation has the Minister had with the social security people in Northern Ireland about this matter? As he knows, it is handled differently in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Evans: Northern Ireland is not directly comparable because it is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I shall convey the concerns expressed to him.

I was dealing with the exemptions to the under-25 principle, which I have illustrated. The third one is that we have exempted registered housing association tenants. Persons who are living in a household where a death has occurred are exempt for 52 weeks, and persons who could afford their rent prior to claiming benefit are exempt for 13 weeks. By drawing the exemptions in that fashion, we are targeting those in need and making arrangements which, coupled with the subsidy to local authorities to make discretionary payments in exceptional hardship, will provide a satisfactory outcome. I do not accept the point made by the hon. Member for Withington about discretionary budgeting in the course of the year. It is for local authorities to operate that scheme.

To summarise the first part of my speech, the changes for the under-25s will affect only single childless people who, basically, are seeking while on benefit to live beyond their means.

Before dealing with the second topic, I should make it clear that we shall monitor the change carefully to see what impact it has upon the market as a whole, as well as looking at the effectiveness of the change in respect of young people's choice of accommodation.

Mr. Frank Field: If it is shown during the monitoring that an increasing number of young people become homeless, what will the Minister do?

Mr. Evans: That is the most hypothetical of hypothetical questions. I shall monitor the change carefully and we shall see what happens. Obviously, it would be of concern to everybody in the House if the adverse consequences mentioned by the hon. Gentleman were to occur, but let us see.

I am conscious of the fact that, because I have given way, I have been speaking for longer than I had intended. I shall deal with the periodicity changes. Housing benefit is currently paid wholly or partly in advance at one, two or four-weekly intervals. It is normally sent to the claimant, who is then responsible for using it to pay his rent. In some circumstances, in order to protect the tenancy, the benefit is paid directly to the landlord, again normally in advance.

In practice, what happens now—before the instrument has come into effect—is that rent tends to be paid two weeks in advance and two weeks in arrears because of the

[Mr. Evans]

timing of the administration. However, payment in advance is inherently unsafe. It allows changes in circumstances that affect benefit entitlement, such as earnings from employment, to be taken into account at a later stage than they should be. Sometimes that leads to underpayment of benefit, thereby temporarily disadvantaging the claimant until the correct entitlement is restored. I am sure that we do not want that.

The serious concern for the Government in the context of the debate is that payment in advance sometimes leads to overpayment of benefit. Unfortunately, there are far too many overpayments—nearly £2 million in the private rented sector during 1994-95. Many of them are incurred quite innocently, but innocent or otherwise, I am sorry to say that it does not mean that recovery is not difficult.

We estimate that overpayments total about £400 million a year, including a staggering £165 million due to claimant error in the private rented sector alone.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The hon. Gentleman expressed concern that payment in advance is inherently unsafe. Has he considered that his policy could have been calculated to generate a culture of fraud? In future, paying housing benefit in arrears—four weeks later—will put young people particularly under great pressure to fail to conform to their contractual obligations, because landlords invariably seek payment in advance. Has the Minister considered that? Will he also consider for whom it is inherently unsafe? Has he considered the position of tenants on very low incomes, who will be placed in immense personal difficulty as a result of having somehow to find the money not only for the first four weeks' rent but for a deposit?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman raised a variety of points. Perhaps the most striking is the statement that landlords always expect their rent in advance. That is a result of market distortion arising out of rent restriction controls. Until 1919, the invariable practice was for rent to be paid in arrears. In the old days, the rent collector came round at the end of the week, not at the beginning of the week before the tenant had even lived there for a day. The long history of rent restriction this century has diminished the number of properties in the private rented sector, and landlords left in the market have been able to take advantage of the circumstances—partly created by the payment of housing benefit—and to demand rent in advance. In that situation, a form of bidding by the landlords takes place, based on the fact that the state will always pay.

We believe that there is a more appropriate way to help those faced with that situation, apart from removing the distortion in the market. Various rent deposit and guarantee schemes, run by local authorities and voluntary organisations, are springing up in different areas, and they are extremely successful. I have visited the scheme in Bristol and I was especially impressed that the guarantees are not usually called on, because all sides have played fair.

There is a real fraud problem, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who chairs the Select Committee on Social Security, will be aware as a result of his report, to which the Government replied today. The purpose of payment in arrears is to remove one possibility for fraud. The hon. Member for Withington quoted the Social Security Advisory Committee repeatedly: and that committee has said that it is legitimate for the Department, to aim to reduce overpayments of housing benefit, and that some overpayments would be avoided or reduced by the proposal to pay in arrears.

The regulations will deal with another, smaller, fraud—the abuse of the first payment. Under the advance payment scheme, in some cases the claimant took the cheque, vanished, and never turned up at the landlord's property or paid the money over. Under the regulations, the cheque will be given to the claimant, because it is his benefit, but it will be made out in the name of the landlord, so that it can be used only for the purpose that Parliament intended. That was described by the SSAC as a sensible precaution, and I respectfully adopt it.

I invite my hon. Friends to reject the motion. Considerable savings will result from the regulations. For payments to under-25s, in the first year, the saving will be £15 million; it will be £60 million in the second year; £65 million in the third year; and £65 million a year thereafter. The periodicity changes will save £105 million in the first year; £120 million in the second; £75 million in the third; and £25 million a year thereafter. That totals £120 million in the first year; £180 million in the second; £140 million in the third; and £90 million a year thereafter. The interesting political question to which the country and the House will want to know the answer is whether, if the hon. Member for Withington were to invite his hon. Friends to vote against the regulations, we would see another Labour spending commitment on top of some £470 million made at Question Time on 21 May.

4.57 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Groups ranging from the Young Homelessness Group to the Government's Social Security Advisory Committee, the Small Landlord's Association and the National Association of Estate Agents oppose the regulations. The Minister said that the regulations are designed to deal with abuses, yet he cannot give any real explanation of those abuses and how they will be dealt with. In its report "Housing in England, 1994-95", which was published in April, the Central Statistical Office found no evidence of such abuse by young people under 25.

The Government seem to think that housing benefit encourages young people to leave the family home and set up in luxurious apartments. There is no evidence for that. On the contrary, most young people who are forced into leaving home are not in a position to provide for themselves and they do not live in accommodation much different from that of others in their age group. As my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said, thousands of under-25s buy their homes, and they have been encouraged to do so by the Government and by a system under which it is better to get mortgage interest tax relief than no benefit. They are to be penalised.

There is no evidence of the kind of abuse that the Government say the regulations are designed to tackle. The real issue, which was admitted by the Minister, is tackling the rising cost of housing benefit. Who is responsible for that rise? The blame must be laid fairly and squarely at the door of the Government and Conservative Members. When the Government repealed the Rent Acts that regulated private rents, they knew that people would not be able to afford market rents.

In 1988, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Nicholas Ridley, said that housing benefit would be available to help tenants who could not afford the full market rent. He said that that was the key component of the Government's policy, and that it would ensure that deregulation did not price lower-income households out of the market.

As a result of the regulations, the housing benefit bill for the private rented sector will be about £4 billion a year and will accommodate a small fraction of the population. However, the bill for council housing will be £5.5 billion for a sector that is occupied by nearly a third of the population. The reason for the rise in housing benefit is clearly that private rents are high and because private landlords are able to demand them, but the public sector can produce housing at much lower cost.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): The question seems simple. To hold down rents, we either have artificial rent controls and controls on what landlords can charge, or we set limits on what people should pay. The hon. Lady advocates state control of rents, but we simply say that we should limit what people should be expected to pay. If we do not do that, rents will continue to be forced up by the unlimited availability of housing benefit to pay the reference rent in particular areas. Reference levels have drifted up and up because they are underwritten by the state. Surely that must stop.

Dr. Jones: That is correct, but the people who rely on housing benefit are not in a bargaining position. There is a shortage, despite what the Government say about the increase in houses available in the private rented sector. The number has increased, but largely as a result of the collapse in the home ownership market because of falling prices. There is still a shortage in relation to demand, and I predict that, if the home ownership market picks up, which the Government hope will happen, there will be a further collapse in the availability of rented houses, particularly for students. I could give much evidence of that in my constituency.

Rents have been deregulated and gone up, councils are not able to build new homes, and vulnerable people are forced into the private sector. They have little bargaining power and they have to pay the rents that are demanded of them. Responsible local authorities have attempted to intervene in the market and to develop good relationships with the private sector. That has happened in Birmingham. In a debate last year, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"In particular, we are keen to expand the role played by the private rented sector in offering accommodation to people in housing need. It is a mistake to assume that private rented accommodation will, by definition, be inadequate . . .

Local authorities themselves have also done a great deal. A number have introduced imaginative schemes to encourage local landlords to co-operate with them in housing families and others in need."

Private landlords are reluctant in normal circumstances to house people who are poor and in need, and that is why local authority interventions have been necessary. The Minister continued:

"One approach that is achieving impressive results is the introduction of rent and deposit guarantee schemes. They give landlords the reassurances that they may require to house low-income tenants and can dramatically increase the chances of such households gaining access to rented accommodation."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 315.]

That was a recognition by a Minister last year, which was recognised again by the Minister today, that people in housing need and on benefit need a leg up in getting private landlords to take them on, but while commending such schemes, the Government are undermining them.

I am the chair of the Birmingham bond scheme. We have arrangements with landlords on our approved lists, and we give rent deposits only to landlords who offer reasonable accommodation. That includes bed-sits. They are happy to co-operate with us because they know that the rent deposit will be guaranteed and because we have a good relationship with housing benefit agencies and can help to iron out any problems with bureaucracy. The effect of the regulations on rent, and the demand for payment of rent in advance, would undermine that scheme at a stroke.

These proposals follow those that were implemented in January and which limit rents to local reference rents. For those under the age of 25, there is no top-up allowance for the difference between the average rent in an area and that which the rent officer deems reasonable. Rents are being held down and will have to be paid in advance. I shall give an example of what that will mean to our scheme.

At the moment, our market-based rents are about £45 to £50 a week for a bed-sit and £65 to £80 a week for a one-bedroomed, self-contained flat. The rent officer has now restricted the rent for such properties to £32 and £45 a week. That means that landlords will no longer be willing to take on tenants. I have given the rents for reasonable accommodation that can be let, but people on low incomes will increasingly be forced into poor standard accommodation. At a stroke, the Government will undermine the good work that we have been doing and which has been commended by them.

The proposals are a crude device and do not offer adequate protection to vulnerable young people who cannot live with their families. I do not know why we think it so desirable that young people should continue to live with their families for as long as possible. I left home at the age of 18 when I went to university; I suspect that most Conservative Members also left home at an early age and were probably able to afford reasonable accommodation and may have been able to buy houses. When I was 22, like many of my colleagues, I was able to buy a house. Many people under the age of 25 want to live in reasonable accommodation. It is a good idea that, at the age of about 18, they should start to live in some kind of furnished accommodation, perhaps even in bed-sits if good quality ones are available.

I checked today on the rents for student accommodation that is offered in halls of residence in Birmingham. The rent for accommodation in a four-unit bed-sit is £30 to £50 a week. That is the kind of supportive environment in which we might want under-25s to live. However, quality bed-sit accommodation is not available. The Department of the Environment's consultation document on houses in multiple occupation states that 44 per cent. of HMOs were unfit.

Mr. Jenkin: It is always risky to talk in this place about our own experiences, but I shall join the hon. Lady in taking that risk. When I came back from university and started my first job, I lived at home for more than a year and then rented a room in a house. It was furnished

[Mr. Jenkin]

accommodation at modest cost. Is not that what we would expect young people to do? I was in my early 20s, but I did not become a home owner until my late 20s. The hon. Lady was a better capitalist than me. Young people are in a better position to make do, and we should expect them to take that course rather than to expect self-contained accommodation as of right at public expense.

Dr. Jones: It is reasonable for young people to progress from some kind of supported accommodation when they first leave home—that might not necessarily be the case—but I would expect it to be of reasonable quality. Rents for bed-sits of reasonable quality in Birmingham are between £45 and £50 a week, but much of the stock is inadequate and nobody wants to move into it; 44 per cent. of it is unfit and much of it is a fire risk. The Government, through these regulations, are encouraging the supply of substandard accommodation.

The combination of the one-room principle, the local reference rent and the demand for rents in advance has undermined the efforts to provide reasonable accommodation for young people. Most young people stay at home and, perhaps, do not want to leave, but many of the people we are talking about do not have a choice. They are forced out of their homes for reasons beyond their control.

I was fortunate in that I went to university, but if I had not I would not have been able to stay in the family home. Indeed, I was not able to do so during the vacation. I did not have the luxury of going back to what I would imagine in the case of the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) was a pleasant, large family home. I lived in a two-bedroomed council flat, which I shared with my sister, and had a mentally ill father. Those are the circumstances in which many young people live today.

In Birmingham, it is estimated that 4,000 to 5,000 people will be affected by these cuts. Young people who move into average accommodation today, where the full rent will be met, are likely to experience a cut of £15 to £20 per week in their benefit when it is reviewed in October. Let us also consider the young people who are currently working and, perhaps, renting a one-bedroomed flat. If they lose their job and fall on hard times, or if their income is cut and they are forced to rely on housing benefit, they will be given 13 weeks in which to find somewhere else to live. They will be forced to move out of their accommodation by these regulations. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Colchester, North thinks that that is a good thing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Withington said, there is also a disincentive for people who are currently in receipt of housing benefit, and who live in reasonable accommodation, to get work because they are worried that, if they fall on hard times, they will be forced out of their accommodation. They have little bargaining power. If they are on income support or are in work, they are expected to live on £37.90. That is what the benefits system assumes they need if they are on a low income and need housing benefit to top up their wages. That is £10 less than the figure for the over-25s. As a result of the regulations, young people will be under pressure to go down market into unsafe, unsuitable accommodation, and they will boost the market for cheap and poorly maintained properties.

Whether young people are in self-contained accommodation prior to January, or in supported schemes which are exempt, it will become impossible for them to move on while still on benefit without accepting a lower standard of accommodation. Places in supported schemes will then become blocked, making it impossible to provide appropriate accommodation for newly homeless youngsters escaping abuse or overcrowding.

If the Government are concerned about containing the housing benefit bill and about giving a reasonable chance in life to young people—nobody expects them to be able to live in luxury—they should reconsider their policies on housing and social security. They should encourage, for example, the provision of foyer-type schemes and support responsible local authorities that are setting up schemes with private landlords. In Birmingham, we have a landlords' charter. We have responsible lodging schemes, which January's regulations have affected. Schemes that were supported by social services now have to take a cut of some £60 a week. The unscrupulous who are providing accommodation for vulnerable people will continue to do so and charge the highest rent possible while providing appalling conditions for the young and vulnerable and mentally ill people.

The proposed regulations are an absolute disgrace and have been introduced as a result of the Government's disastrous housing policies. It is the Government who have forced up the cost of housing benefit.

5.14 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I enjoyed listening to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), but she rather spoilt her speech at the end because she failed to offer any solution other than the old failed solutions. We can only assume that that is what she was offering, because she did not offer anything.

I shall use this opportunity to step back a little and look at this conceptually. There is a growing consensus across the House—I regret that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is not in his place—that there is too much means-testing in our benefits system. The more the benefits system grows, the more people are drawn into means-testing and the more people are subject to the perverse effects of means tests. The more generous housing benefit provision has become—even if only by virtue of the fact that rising rents have led to rising housing benefit, and increased unemployment has led to rising benefit levels—the more people have adapted to qualify for it. There is a consensus in the Social Security Select Committee that people adjust their circumstances to qualify for means-tested benefits. More people end up on benefit, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation will say that they are poor because they are on means-tested benefits.

How do we stop that trend? The Opposition complain about means testing, but they want to maintain the excessive generosity of such benefits and end up supporting the mechanism that creates the very problem that we need to deal with. Public expenditure grows as means-tested benefits generate their own demand.

Means tests generate a perverse moral climate. As the hon. Member for Birkenhead increasingly tells us in the Select Committee, what message does that send to people who are trapped in adverse circumstances? What a message to send to young people starting out in life: they

can afford better accommodation if they take housing benefit and remain unemployed. Naturally, the Government are absolutely right to do everything possible to make a contract between the unemployed receiving benefit and the Benefits Agency. One must be actively seeking work. That is certainly an improvement, but we can do more to remove the disincentives.

Are we happy with a system that effectively proclaims to every young person, "If you leave home without a job, the state will provide you with self-contained accommodation as a right"? Are we happy that the benefits system should in effect proclaim to parents, "Throw your teenagers out with impunity; the state will provide; you needn't be responsible for the people whom you have brought into the world"? The Labour party seems to be saying, "Your son and daughter will be given self-contained accommodation as a right."

Most working people who pay taxes, including a great many poor people, are aghast at the way in which the benefits system seems to subsidise life styles that people, particularly older people, never dreamed they would enjoy, even in their later years. Many young people on benefits are not just claiming benefits. Part of the perversity of means-tested benefits is that we encourage people to hide their entrepreneurialism, their natural affinity to work and to earn. Very often, people are taking a bit more on the side than they are letting the Benefits Agency know about.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does my hon. Friend agree that all too often the state appears to be taking over from human parents, to become an individual's parent in terms of financial and other support, which does not encourage personal responsibility among young people?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Concepts that are popular among Opposition parties include social exclusion and social cohesion. The worst way to create social cohesion is to atomise society by making the state more and more responsible for the individual's circumstances, instead of allowing the natural institutions of society—the family and community—to take their share of responsibility.

Dr. Lynne Jones: What evidence does the hon. Gentleman have of the abuse that he claims? The Social Security Advisory Committee recommended that the Government should collate evidence to justify views of the sort that the hon. Gentleman is espousing—and only then introduce the regulations.

Mr. Jenkin: The Social Security Select Committee has just completed an extensive investigation into housing benefit fraud. It is argued that we have only scratched the surface and that Government figures grossly underestimate the scale of the problem. I do not fully accept that evidence, but that is erring on the side of caution. Labour Members have used the fraud issue to suggest that the Government are not exercising enough control.

Dr. Jones: I was referring not to abuse but to evidence to support the allegation that young people deliberately leave home to be mollycoddled by the state, and that it pays housing benefit to allow youngsters to live in luxurious accommodation.

Mr. Jenkin: I do not intend to produce such evidence now because the hon. Lady is using language that I did not use. The more generous housing benefit is and the greater its availability to young people, the more they are likely to avail themselves of it. The only way to restore society's natural values is to make people more responsible for the consequences of their actions and to ensure that families take more responsibility for their young adult offspring.

These regulations are conceptually adjusting the priorities. It is just at the margin. We are not creating a revolution. We are only questioning the hierarchy of priorities. Is it that young people should take jobs and that families ought to take responsibility for them—or is it that young people should as of right occupy self-contained accommodation funded by the state? Obviously all young people have a right to dignified accommodation, but as its quality increases, who should be responsible for its provision? Should it not be more the responsibility of the individual and his or her family and less the responsibility of the state?

I look forward to the time when the values and expectations of people in this country have radically altered. New Labour is interested in the so-called stakeholding society of Singapore. When the Select Committee visited that country, it was interested to find that Singapore's equivalent of our Department of Social Security is determined to avoid the mistakes that western societies have made in creating state dependency and poverty traps. It is difficult to imagine how that determination is manifested without observing it at first hand. It is ironic that new Labour is so enamoured of the stakeholder model of Singapore but shies away when that country's social policies are implemented in the United Kingdom. Labour wants to cherry-pick one or two aspects of the Singapore model but leave the rest behind.

The key challenge to those of us who take an interest in the future of the UK social security system is in devising ways of restoring individual and family responsibility, by gradually removing from the state as humanely as possible the excessive responsibilities that it has taken on. The regulations do exactly that. They chip away at the expectation that young people should receive so much from the state so early in their lives.

The Labour party offers not a policy that tends towards responsibility, self-determination and individual empowerment but opposition that is very much old Labour. We heard in the speech of the hon. Member for Selly Oak a call for a return to rent controls, large public housing schemes and an ever-rising bill for housing benefit. That is not the recipe that has brought success to housing or social security policy in this country or any other in Europe or elsewhere in the world that has tried using large-scale public expenditure to solve social problems. We should aim at eventually achieving alternative models that give people social security in the fullest sense—not just satisfy our consciences by doling out large sums of public money.

5.26 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): We cannot consider the regulations in isolation but must view them together with all the other Government measures that have affected under-25s. Since 1988, that age group has received lower income support. I have never understood why younger people are supposed to manage on less money than any others. Their food, clothing and other costs are exactly the same.

[Ms Liz Lynne]

From October, the unemployment benefit element of the jobseeker's allowance for the under-25s will be reduced to income support level, yet again penalising that age group. That double action will mean that £10 a week will be lost to those young people.

We want facts, figures and other evidence from the Government to back their claims. The Government say that young people expect to live in bed-sits or shared accommodation, that housing benefit is an incentive for young people to leave home and that the current level of housing benefit encourages them to do so. Have any surveys been undertaken? If the Minister has time to reply, can he cite evidence to show how many of the 870,000 young people in question live in self-contained accommodation? We must have that figure before we can judge how the regulations will work.

Where is the evidence that young people are more likely to request or occupy more expensive accommodation than their contemporaries who are in employment? The Government have produced none. The Government talk about young people milking the system, but where is the proof? How many people go into shared accommodation?

The Government are attempting to change young people's life styles without giving us the facts behind their proposal. Even the Social Security Advisory Committee said that young unemployed people aged under 25 had the same general preference for accommodation as those in employment, and that no evidence suggests that young people are encouraged to leave home because they could get a flat on their own.

I fear that the regulations will make young people less mobile. The Government must deal with the fact that there are many legitimate reasons why young people leave home. They do so because, in some cases, they have been sexually or physically abused. They do not talk about it and they do not want to involve social services, but that is a good reason for their leaving home. It is not, therefore, that they are encouraged to leave because they are going to get a good housing benefit level. Some of those young people have genuine reasons.

Young people in self-contained accommodation are not going to move to find work. Surely the Government want young people to move around the country to find work, but, if they are in self-contained accommodation in one region, they will find that, if they move to find work but do not do so, they will end up in a bed-sit.

These changes could cause severe hardship for youngsters under 25 because the shortfalls between the rent and housing benefit must be met from somewhere. If those young people cannot find rented accommodation at the rent levels that will be set, because of the jobseekers' provisions and all the other debts that they will get into, they could face poverty. In the long term, quite a few of them could face homelessness.

Many of those people will be forced into potentially dangerous accommodation. Some of the standards in multiple-occupancy accommodation are not good. I do not know whether the Minister has been around such accommodation, but I have. Some of it is a fire risk and some a death trap.

Even the Children's Society was coming out against all young people being forced into multi-occupancy accommodation. It was talking about vulnerable young people, who find it difficult to communicate with each other and who would have a problem sharing a bathroom, a kitchen, a stove or washing-up facilities. The problem is that, if they could not cope with that shared accommodation, they could find themselves out on the streets.

The Minister has talked about giving concessions for young people coming out of care, and I am glad that he is considering taking that further. I am also pleased that he is considering Scotland as well, because that was an oversight. I am glad that he will deal with that problem. I am also concerned about young people in bed-sit accommodation. They could be subjected to drugs, harassment and abuse. I am not saying that that would happen in all multi-occupancy accommodation, but the Minister should be considering that point.

In relation to the change from paying rent in advance to paying rent in arrears and not paying any deposits, many of those young people will not be able to find accommodation because multi-occupancy houses will not be available and, if they are, landlords will probably not take them in.

The problem is that, once landlords know that under-25s are allowed to go into only bed-sit or multi-occupancy accommodation, standards will fall. Many more investigators will have to check the standards of those properties, because some landlords will be good and will meet their responsibility but some will not. I hope that the Minister is aware of the Government's responsibility in that.

Certain young people face a harsh future with these regulations, which come in next October. As I have said, some will face homelessness and some will face living in poor accommodation. I hope that the Government will think again before it is too late. I will vote to revoke the regulations.

5.33 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My big concern in the debate is that I have not heard anything from Opposition Members that shows concern for taxpayers in all this. It is taxpayers who must find the money to pay for housing benefit. Often, they pay for many people to have housing benefit to live in accommodation that is better than that in which the taxpayers themselves live.

Housing benefit is a £10 billion a year benefit. It costs every working man and woman in this country about £400 a year, so it is up to the House of Commons to ensure that the benefit is paid to people in genuine need and that it is not open to abuse; one of the concerns of the Social Security Select Committee has been that, in our investigations, we have found considerable housing benefit abuse.

Many stories are around. I am sure that many Members of Parliament have been told the wide-ranging stories of abuse, some of which one may not be able to prove, but which are worrying. The fact that the Government are proposing to tighten housing benefit is to be welcomed by taxpayers and by hon. Members. We must encourage young people not to become adept at claiming housing benefit but to use their skills and abilities to obtain work.

What I have found is that no young person will suffer as a result of these changes. The evidence is that they will still be able to afford reasonable accommodation of

a reasonable quality at a reasonable price. If, however, they conspire with landlords to receive a larger amount of money out of the taxpayer, as a result of the changes, that will not work.

The Opposition have been calling for evidence. I will tell them of some staggering evidence in my constituency surgery. A young person recently came in and demanded that I get him housing benefit of £100 a week for a self-contained unit of accommodation in the Dover region. I happen to know that, in that region, it is possible for many people to find accommodation costing between £60 and £80 a week.

There are many properties of below £100 a week, but that young person decided that that was the accommodation that he wanted and that he expected the taxpayer to pay for, despite the fact that many middle-aged and elderly people in my constituency are claiming housing benefit at only £40 to £60 a week, and are living in much more modest, but reasonable and acceptable, accommodation. The state should not be providing £100 a week when it is possible to live reasonably in reasonable accommodation at much less than that.

This measure is fair because it contains safeguards. Local authorities will still have the discretion to pay benefit above the average cost of shared accommodation, especially where there are examples of exceptional hardship. The other reasonable point here is that the new limit for housing benefit is to be introduced only at the average cost of non-self-contained accommodation in the region. By having regard to the average cost, the Government have been reasonable.

There are plenty of statistics around. District valuers and others are competent at assembling valuation statistics. I do not see why councils, using similar techniques, are not capable of establishing good figures on the average accommodation cost, or, therefore, why we cannot operate a housing benefit system that is much more related to real cost that can be measured and recorded.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the question, pursuant to Order [21 May].*

The House divided: Ayes 247, Noes 273.

Division No. 137] **[5.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*

Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mrs. Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm

Thumham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before we embark on the next debate and start to use up the time allowed for it, I should like to raise a point of order on that time limit. The Order Paper states that the debate will last only one and a half hours, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B(1).

You will be aware that, on the last page of the statutory instrument, five European Community documents are cited as the base legislation on which it has come before us. I was minded to table amendments in relation to those documents, which—if selected—would have dealt with the need for the documents, their integrity and their merits. I have refrained from doing so because of the time limit on the debate.

Could you confirm that the debate would not be confined to an hour and a half if this statutory instrument had been debated before 2 November last year and that it could have gone on until as late as 11.30 pm, which would have allowed a wide-ranging debate had I tabled those amendments and had they been selected? Could you confirm that that is the fact that now confronts the House in debating these important matters?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That may all be true, but the current rules of the House allow only one and a half hours for the next debate. Those are the rules under which the House operates.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on all Back Benchers' speeches for the duration of this debate.

5.56 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): I beg to move,

That the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1242), dated 7th May 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th May, be approved.

I appreciate that many hon. Members want to speak in this debate, and I shall try to keep my comments as brief as possible. I hope that hon. Members will show some forbearance with interventions as I expect to cover most concerns in what I shall say.

I suspect that it will be helpful to the House if I put this order in context with what the European Commission said last week about decommissioning. Last Wednesday, the European Commissioner with responsibility for fisheries, Mrs. Bonino, held a press conference—of which we were given no notice—to outline her proposals for the next round of decommissioning, which is intended to take the European Community from now until the year 2002.

It is difficult for me to help the House in any detail on those proposals as they have not yet been tabled by the Commission, but judging from the reports of the press conference, the impact of Mrs. Bonino's proposals, if adopted, would be cuts of up to 40 per cent. in parts of the United Kingdom fishing fleet. That is wholly unacceptable.

Mrs. Bonino went on to describe the UK fishing industry as being among the "bad boys" in Europe for not having met existing decommissioning targets. Such a description is somewhat galling for the UK fishing industry, particularly as Mrs. Bonino described countries such as Spain as being among the good guys. What she failed to connect, of course, was the ability of Spanish fishing interest to move into the UK fleet. It is easier for Spain to meet her decommissioning targets when a significant number of Spanish-skippered, Spanish-owned and Spanish-crewed vessels are masquerading as UK boats and catching fish against the UK national quota. That is a crazy situation which cannot be allowed to continue. The European Commission cannot be surprised that the UK fishing industry is not and will not be prepared to contemplate any further substantial reductions in the UK fishing fleet until the Commission tackles and deals with the whole issue of quota hoppers.

When Mrs. Bonino was in the UK recently, she gave the impression that there might be some simple way within the existing rules which, if only the UK Government were to take it, would enable us to eliminate quota hoppers within a short time. No one is keener than I am to see the quota hoppers dealt with without delay and for UK fish to be available for UK fishermen. I therefore immediately instructed officials to explore in detail with Commission officials what it was that Mrs. Bonino was suggesting that we might do to tackle quota hoppers.

I am bound to tell the House that, on further detailed investigation, it became clear that there was no immediate solution that the Commission could offer. I am sorry that

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responsible newspapers such as *The Independent*, presumably on the basis of Commission briefing, have suggested that there is such a remedy available. There is not, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we shall be seeking to deal with the whole problem of quota hoppers at the intergovernmental conference.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Given the nonsense coming out of Brussels and especially that uttered by Mrs. Bonino, given the nonsense of the common fisheries policy and especially the discard policy, and given that the Government are raising the issue of quota hoppers at the IGC, may I suggest that we go one stage further and seek a fundamental renegotiation of the common fisheries policy, not least so that we could control our own waters, no doubt with the same pattern—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is about decommissioning only.

Mr. Baldry: We should at all times show leadership in the European Union and in the fundamental reforms of the common fisheries policy that we seek.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I must make progress; this is only a short debate.

The straightforward fact is that upwards of 150 UK-registered vessels are now owned, or part owned, by foreign interests, mainly from Spain and the Netherlands. They represent some 20 per cent. of our offshore fleet and take a significant proportion of UK quotas of fish such as hake, plaice, megrim, sole and monkfish. Such a situation cannot be allowed to continue. The Commission and the European Community must take action to deal with quota hoppers.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I give way first to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) .

Mr. Tyler: Does the Minister recall that the issue of decommissioning and quota hopping was mentioned when I brought a delegation to see him on 27 November? He told us that it was not possible to deal with the matter in the context of the IGC. Will he consider specifically quota-hopping flag boats which have not, as I understand it, been involved in the decommissioning scheme at all, except for perhaps one boat? If the scheme continues as it is, 50 per cent. of certain species, notably hake and plaice, could be taken from our quota by quota-hopping, flag of convenience foreign boats.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a very short debate. Many hon. Members have put their names down to speak, but the hon. Gentleman was not one of them. Long interventions are not helpful.

Mr. Baldry: Let me make it absolutely clear that, as I have just said, at the IGC we intend to deal fully with the issue of quota hoppers. The Community has to take action to deal with quota hoppers. The current crazy situation cannot continue.

I now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough, but I think that this must be the last intervention that I accept.

Mr. Sykes: I represent Scarborough and Whitby. Is the Minister aware of the tidal wave of anger and frustration that has swept my constituency over the question of decommissioning? Is it not time that this country decided for itself what constitutes its own waters? Should not Britannia show Mrs. Bonino the way and declare a 200-mile limit around our shores?

Mr. Baldry: I regularly meet representatives of the fishing industry. I met representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation the day before yesterday, and I am glad that they very much support the line that I am taking. I work very closely with the UK fishing industry. Indeed, I see my role as doing what is in its best interests. If there is to be fishing in the European Union against national quotas, it makes sense that the quotas benefit the fishing communities of individual nations rather than the vessels of other European Union member states which rarely, if ever, visit the countries concerned—let alone bring any economic benefit—but simply catch their fish against those countries' fishing quotas.

We have told the IGC, the Commission and other member states that we shall be tabling changes to the treaty which should enable individual member states to adopt appropriate measures to ensure that their fishing communities and related industries are able to benefit fully from the national quotas allocated under Community fishing policy.

There will be an initial discussion, but no decision, on the Commission's latest proposals on fleet structure and fishing effort at the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg next week. In any event, the full proposals have not yet been issued. I shall be making it clear that, until real and substantial progress is made on tackling quota hoppers, the Commission cannot be surprised that we shall not be ready to agree how to reduce further the UK fishing fleet. I shall, however, be making a number of other points.

I do not want there to be any scintilla of a suggestion that, when progress is made on quota hoppers, we shall simply accept any restructuring or decommissioning targets that the Commission wishes to set—far from it. First, the Commission's proposals for the next round are apparently based on a report by scientists known as the Lassen report, which makes recommendations as to where fishing effort should be reduced in Community waters but, bizarrely, makes no recommendation for reducing industrial fishing. It appears that the proposals, which currently look as though they might reduce UK fishing effort by up to 40 per cent., would have absolutely no impact on industrial fishing—a form of fishing which is

carried out on a huge scale and has implications for much of the marine ecosystem. It is very difficult to agree fisheries conservation measures which seek to cut pretty well every other aspect of the fishing fleet if they leave industrial fishing untouched. It is quite bizarre.

We are all aware, and the UK fishing industry recognises, that fishing is a hunting activity and that it is important that there are sustainable levels of fish left in the sea. As the recent report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology made clear, the world's fish stocks are in a state of crisis. That report concluded by saying:

"in their heart of hearts, scientists, fishermen, managers and politicians must all know that action must be taken now"

if we are to prevent a repeat of episodes like the collapse of the Grand Bank stocks. Indeed, the scientists tell us that almost 60 per cent. of the main stocks in the waters that we fish have now been reduced to a level where there is a real risk of biological collapse. Even allowing for all the uncertainties and variables which characterise fisheries management, the stark warning in such messages is clear.

With improved technology, modern vessels are simply more efficient machines for killing fish, and fishing effort has to be matched to what the stocks will bear. Clearly there is a need to reduce fish mortality, but the Commission's proposals on decommissioning simply translate killing capacity into tonnage. Fishing vessels vary enormously, however, and it is again somewhat strange to believe that 1 tonne of an older fishing trawler has the same killing capacity as 1 tonne of a modern, large, well-equipped fishing vessel, with radar and other technology which is able with a good degree of accuracy to target, catch and kill large quantities of fish.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: Many hon. Members wish to speak in this debate. I am sure that I shall cover any issue that the hon. Gentleman intends to raise.

Britain has, on average, a somewhat older fishing fleet than many other member states. We need to ensure that any future structural scheme takes adequate account of the age and killing capacity of the vessels involved and does not simply assume that every tonne of every fishing vessel has an equivalent killing capacity.

I shall also be making it clear next week, when these matters are raised, that countries such as Britain, which spends some £25 million on fisheries protection and enforcement—through the Royal Navy, among other means—should be given credit for that in relation to member states in which, the Commission has acknowledged, enforcement seems to be somewhat less effective.

Clearly, any fishing reduction or effort-control targets must be properly policed. There is a need to match fishing effort to available fish in the sea. Much more work and much more study is required on any proposals that the Commission might bring forward to ensure that they meet the needs adequately and fairly. While that work is going on, we shall expect real progress in considering and taking forward the tackling of quota hoppers.

It is also somewhat galling to be described as being among the "bad boys" of Europe when the European Commission persists in using figures that we have repeatedly told it are incorrect and which give the impression that the UK fishing fleet has increased in recent years. That is not so, and the facts are straightforward. In the past three years, 436 boats have been decommissioned and £26.2 million has been spent on decommissioning. That is a sizeable number of boats—and a substantial amount of money—and represents 6.6 per cent. of the original UK fishing fleet.

There has been wider confusion in the Commission about the UK's past performance and, sadly, a tendency not to compare like with like in publishing tonnage figures. We have been discussing a range of technical points with the Commission and have requested that it make a number of necessary adjustments to our multi-annual guidance programme figure. Once those corrections have been agreed, I believe that we shall be within a handful of percentage points of our target. This scheme will take us closer still.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: As I have said, everyone recognises the need to match fishing effort properly to available fish in the sea. This statutory instrument is designed to deal with our commitments to reduce fishing capacity and to meet targets that are due to expire at the end of this year.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Before my hon. Friend concludes, will he give an assurance that the motion is being introduced purely and simply to help the conservation of fish and has no other ramifications?

Mr. Baldry: The motion completes our obligations under the decommissioning programme. The programme's only objective is to try to match fishing effort to available fish in the sea. It is a continuation of the scheme that was already in place last year.

During the debate last year, a number of suggestions were made about possible improvements to the scheme. I and my hon. Friends who have responsibility for fishing in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland promised to listen carefully to what was said. We have listened. I gave a commitment to seek industry views on what could be done and to reconsider the position in relation to the specific queries that were raised about the scheme last year.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: If the hon. Gentleman allows me, I might tell him some good news.

I gave a commitment, for example, to consider the position on the eligibility of nephrops vessels in the light of subsequent developments. I am glad to be able to tell the House that we have been able to meet almost all the concerns raised in the consultation exercise and significantly to expand the 1996 scheme to make it more attractive and better value for money. It might be helpful if I outline briefly those changes and the principle features of the proposed scheme.

In essence, the changes relate to the eligibility criteria, which we have widened considerably. In particular, we have reduced the number of qualifying days spent fishing from 100 to 75. We have removed the restrictions on

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licence type to allow any licensed vessel over 10 m in registered length to apply. That will, of course, allow applications from shell fishermen and from vessels in the Nephrops and distant water segments. I know that that is very much welcomed by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishing Federation. The Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), has had a number of very useful discussions with the SFF on that very point.

In the consultation exercise, I suggested the possibility of allowing vessel owners to retain or dispose separately of their decommissioned vessel's track record. The response demonstrated no support for such arrangements. Again, we listened to the industry and have decided not to proceed with that suggestion. In response to a number of understandable concerns, I have introduced a greater degree of flexibility to permit historic vessels to be preserved afloat. That can be done while safeguarding public funds by allowing such vessels to be placed with registered museums. I very much hope that that will enable what is clearly a valuable part of our maritime heritage to be retained for future generations.

Mr. Gill Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I have already given way to my hon. Friend.

The scheme was launched on 9 May and applications must be submitted before 25 June. Application forms and details of the scheme have been available in local port offices for some time, and it is clearly in the interests of anyone who wishes to apply to do so as soon as possible.

Before concluding, I should like to make one further announcement concerning the Seafish Industry Authority's application for a grant towards its promotional campaign to encourage greater consumption of fish and hence provide better market conditions in future. I am pleased to say that a grant of just over £2.5 million has been approved and will be paid over the next three years.

As the UK Fishing Minister, I have only one interest: to promote the best interests of the UK fishing industry. I think that everyone in the industry recognises that there must be sustainable levels of fishing if the industry is to have a secure future well into the next century. With improved technology, modern vessels are more efficient machines for killing fish. Fishing effort has to be matched to what stocks will bear. The 1996 decommissioning scheme is part of our strategy to ensure that the UK fleet can remain viable, better match available fishing opportunities, and continue to contribute to the renewal of the very fishing resources on which so many livelihoods depend and which I am determined will have a strong future well into the next century. I commend the motion to the House.

6.16 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I welcome the Minister's recognition of some of concerns of the industry and Opposition Members in the new regulations and the multi-annual guidance programme—especially the more flexible approach and the inclusion of nephrops boats in the decommissioning scheme. Opposition Members also welcome the fact that, after lengthy correspondence, the Minister has made provision for some historically interesting boats to be bought by trusts and museums so that they can be preserved. I only hope that that policy does not lead to too many fishing boats ending up in museums.

Now that the Minister has recognised that historically interesting boats can be preserved and need not be destroyed, will he extend the policy to the sale of boats to waters outside the European Union, and, indeed, to overseas aid schemes, on which I know he has received representations from myself and groups?

This debate has been overshadowed by Mrs. Bonino's recent announcement about the 40 per cent. cut in fleet capacity. The Minister was quite right to stress that. There is a serious problem with fish stocks, which the industry recognises, and progress must be made to ensure that the capacity is matched to the available fish stocks. Opposition Members think that the 40 per cent. cut on top of what has already been agreed is just not acceptable. I am quite sure that the Minister agrees that the figure is open to negotiation. We certainly look to the Government to ensure that negotiations result in a more realistic figure.

Opposition Members also want to ensure that the figure is based on sound science. The Minister referred to the Lassen report that brought about the proposal. Although there is a need for effort control, I hope that the Government not only succeed in reducing the 40 per cent. cut but try to get the Commission to accept that effort control need not just be fleet reduction. It can also concern technical conservation gear. I know that the industry—the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishing Federation—has submitted detailed proposals to the Ministry on how technical conservation gear can reduce effort, and I very much hope that they are taken seriously.

I also endorse what the Minister said about the disgraceful omission of industrial fishing. It is remarkable that a serious study on fish stocks has not taken into account the impact of overfishing in industrial fishing, and the effect it has on the overall ecology of the sea.

I welcome the Minister's strong comments about industrial fishing. I regret, however, that the Government gave financial aid to a fish meal plant in the United Kingdom based on industrial fishing. I only wish that they had thought about the impact of industrial fishing in the way the Minister did tonight when they were considering that particular grant.

The report concentrates on weaker stocks. That is understandable, but it does not take into account the impact of the figures. The fact that the United Kingdom fleet is older than many of the more modern fleets that have taken advantage of grants needs to be worked into the equation.

As the Minister said, the report does not take into account the impact of flag vessels on the United Kingdom register that represent 20 per cent. of the fleet fishing some stocks. That is an amazing figure. He said that action needed to be taken, and that Mrs. Bonino was considering what should be done. However, he could have produced some firm proposals to put to the Commission on how the problem of flag vessels should be tackled.

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friends need no lectures whatsoever from Labour, as their leader says that he will

never be isolated in Europe. If he had his way, we would be sold lock, stock and barrel to the European Commission, with all that that entails.

Mr. Morley: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. We are having a serious debate on serious matters, not the rubbish put out by Tory central office. I have been concentrating on the central issues; however, I should stress that the Labour party argued for decommissioning and other measures, for years before the Government implemented them. We have also argued for technical conservation measures and working with the European Union to address some of the problems.

One of the main reasons why we have an aging fleet and why we are have these problems is that we were the last country in Europe to introduce the decommissioning scheme, and that should be taken into account.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that, for the past 17 years, the Tory Government have been responsible for running down the fishing fleet around the coast of Britain? As there will be a general election in the next 12 months, they are now singing a different tune. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is rather odd that the Government, who are vetoing everything blanket fashion in the Common Market, are not voting against tonight's proposal?

Mr. Morley: The tone of the Minister's speech has subtly changed in recent debates. He seems to have moved towards a more Eurosceptic point of view. That demonstrates the weakness of the Government and the fact that the tail is wagging the dog.

I return to the serious problems and issues that must be addressed. There has been a history of mismanagement of the fisheries industry in Britain, and it does not all involve the European Union. There has been a great deal of mismanagement of Government policy, and the delay in decommissioning is only one aspect of it.

Will the Minister consider how we should deal with the flag ships? Does he have any firm proposals? Both the Minister and the Prime Minister have said that they intend to deal with flag vessels. That is fine, and we agree, but what are the Government's proposals? How do they intend to address the issue?

Some minor issues that Opposition Members have repeatedly raised have been ignored. They include the national insurance contributions from the crews of flag vessels, the requirement for British officers to captain those ships, and the proportionate use of United Kingdom port facilities. I do not dispute that there are difficulties, but the Government ought to consider them and draw up proposals.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): We are.

Mr. Morley: The Minister says, "We are." I hope that he will spell out some of those proposals tonight. He might like to consider raising with the Commission an extension of the decommissioning scheme in order to buy out some of the flag vessels that are currently on our register. I agree that the way in which foreign vessels have flagged out on our register to fish on our fish stocks is certainly an abuse of national quotas and fish stocks.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm to the House that he agrees with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who said on 19 December:

"It is unacceptable that we should be decommissioning vessels to facilitate additional fishing opportunities in waters around the UK for the fishing industry of one of our European partners—in this case Spain."?—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1358.]

Does he agree with that?

Mr. Morley: It is totally unacceptable that we should be asking UK fishermen to decommission to make way for vessels from other member states. That is not acceptable to the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East was quite right about that.

To return to the reduction of effort and the abuse of the flag vessels, there is a lesson of regulation for the Government to learn. We need to make progress in dealing with that and addressing our own reduction figure.

When we were termed the bad boys of Europe by Mrs. Bonino, she was referring not to the fishing industry but to the Government. We have made very little progress towards our target set by the MAGP. The Minister said that he intends to announce how near we are to that target, but hon. Members may have noticed that there was no such announcement tonight. It would be helpful if the Minister would tell the House what progress has been made and how near we are to meeting those targets.

I know that the Minister is having discussions, but some of those discussions on how the targets are met and the way in which the figures are calculated depend on the good will of the European Commission and whether it will accept the Government's interpretation of them. We are all aware that the present atmosphere is somewhat strained.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should make rather faster progress towards those targets? Would that not mean further cuts in the amount of fish that British fishermen can fish?

Mr. Morley: I shall come to that point in a moment, but, as the Minister said, the industry recognises there has to be some reduction, in order to match our fishing capacity to available fish stocks. There is no argument about that, but we can certainly argue about the level of the reduction, the basis of the calculation and the science being used. There is a great deal of debate on those issues.

As for meeting the reduction, Labour has long argued that, if there has to be some reduction within the present targets—not the 40 per cent. that I consider is not sustainable and will not be imposed in the United Kingdom, but the scheme that has been agreed as part of the four-year programme—it should have been front-loaded in the first place. If we agree that there should be a reduction in the fleet, surely it would be better that it should happen as quickly as possible to help those who want to get out of the industry to do so, and to make more fish available for those who want to remain in the industry. In that respect, the Minister still has an option of bringing forward the £13 million that is earmarked for next year.

Dr. Godman: Both the Minister and my hon. Friend have referred to our aging fleets. In essence, we are talking about the reduction of an aging national fleet. At the same time, we must talk about the renewal of the remaining smaller fleet. Particularly on the west coast of Scotland, we need new vessels to replace our drastically aging fleet.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about a real problem within the industry. If we made some

[Mr. Morley]

progress with decommissioning, the Government would be eligible for the rebuilding grants that have benefited other countries for some years, and have enabled them to modernise their fleets. Even under the present system, a scrap and build policy that takes into account the aggregation would attract some grants. The Government might like to discuss that with the Commission.

It is clear that the common fisheries policy has failed in respect of sustainable fisheries management. It does not have the confidence of the industry, and in that respect needs a radical reform. The Opposition certainly emphasise that. The Minister said that the Government will raise the issues of reform of the CFP and of flag ships at the IGC, and we very much welcome that. I hope that they make some progress, and that they get some co-operation. But the present policy has been too little, too late, to deal with the problems of the fishing industry, and it does not provide the industry with an option. It is vital that the Government make firm proposals to ensure that we have a sustainable future for our fleet, so that many of our boats do not end up in maritime museums.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): In my opinion, it would be nonsense if the House voted against the motion tonight. The industry is in favour of the scheme, and, in a brief circulated to most hon. Members with fishing interests, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations described the terms of the statutory instrument as "uncontroversial fine-tuning". I am sure that that is right.

I speak as a member of the all-party Back-Bench alliance that fought hard and long to have a second decommissioning scheme introduced. If we stop the decommissioning scheme as it is constituted at present, there would rightly be howls of anguish from the industry. However, I have some reservations about the impact of the decommissioning scheme.

During the last round, for example, there was a concentration of activity regarding the number of boats in certain ports to be decommissioned. In Newlyn, the decommissioning scheme reduced almost at a stroke the catching capacity of the boats there, although other boats were introduced to the area.

The background to the debate tonight is perhaps not so much the details of the scheme included in the statutory instrument, as the remarks by Commissioner Bonino, who called for a 40 per cent. reduction in certain sections of the fleet—albeit across the European Community as a whole for certain sections. Her comments provoked yet more howls of anguish from our fishermen, who were right to protest about the proposal.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) referred to the Lassen report, upon which Commissioner Bonino apparently based her remarks. That report is quite clearly flawed, and all the informed comment, particularly from the NFFO and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, shows its defects. The hon. Gentleman was absolutely correct to focus on the fact that we have an aging fleet, whereas some of the boats in the Spanish fleet in particular are modern vessels.

The report therefore did not compare like with like. We must dismiss some aspects of the report, and the rather crude and unrealistic call by Commissioner Bonino. If her proposal was ever implemented—I do not think it ever will be—it would spell devastation for many of our fishing communities, and for the industry as a whole.

My complaint about Mrs. Bonino's rather superficial remarks is that, in putting forward this "solution", she ignores the basic defects of the CFP. There is a consensus in this House—irrespective of one's attitude towards Europe—that the CFP is, not working, and is in fact anti-conservationist. It is not good enough for the Commission to say that we should somehow cut our fleet, as if that were the answer to the problem. It is not, although it may be a part of the answer.

Like the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, I accept that there will have to be some scaling down of the fleet, and the industry agrees. I regret that, but I do not believe in kidding people. However, if we do not radically reform the CFP, we shall gain nothing by reducing the size of the fleet. We must carry out a root-and-branch reform of the CFP—that is the imperative.

We must also deal with the vexed question of quota hoppers. I have been fighting this wretched business of quota hoppers—or flag of convenience vessels as we called them in the old days—for more than 15 years. I have been spelling out the dangers and what they would lead to long before Spain came into the Community, and that is when action should have been taken. I deplore the fact that the effective action proposed in the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and overruled by the High Court was not taken before Spain came into the Community. If action had been taken, we would not have the problems we face today.

I am indebted to the NFFO for spelling out the present position in stark statistical terms. Do people not realise that, at the moment, much of our quota is not in British hands and does not belong to British fishermen or our industry? Some 46 per cent. of our hake quota and 44 per cent. of our plaice quota is owned by foreign interests, mainly Spanish. For megrim, the figure is 35 per cent., for monkfish it is 29 per cent., and for sole it is 18 per cent. It is well documented that 20 per cent. of the tonnage of our fleet is owned by foreign interests, mainly Spanish and Dutch. That is intolerable and totally unacceptable. No wonder our fishermen are seething with anger, and we were daft to allow this situation to develop. We must put a stop to it.

Having said that, I very much welcome the robust remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister in his immediate response to Commissioner Bonino's irresponsible statement a week ago. I also welcome the pledge by the Prime Minister that, if necessary, we will look for treaty changes to deal with the central issue of quota hopping.

I must say that I am sceptical about the outcome. I was in Spain two weeks ago with other members of a Committee, and we met the Spanish Foreign Minister. The reaction of the Spanish Government to our promise to pursue the matter if necessary at the IGC was to beg Britain not to do so, and they made it clear that they would use the veto if we did. What incensed me was that the Spanish said that there is no problem, despite the figures that I have quoted to the House. It is a huge problem.

We have just as much of a fight on our hands on quota hopping as we have with beef, and it will be a test of the determination of the Government and the Prime Minister to force a solution to the problem. I hope that we will succeed—and we must succeed, in the interests of our

fishing industry and our fishermen. They must be our prime concern in this House, irrespective of party position. There is a huge consensus in the House, especially among those of us who have the honour to represent fishing constituencies. We need results. This is not just a game—I say that with the greatest respect to some of my hon. Friends who comment on these issues.

An industry is at stake here. We must ensure that we defend its rights and those of the United Kingdom. We must pass the statutory instrument, but we must not lose sight of the tremendous battle ahead of us on quota hopping and reform of the common fisheries policy, because the industry's future depends on it.

6.39 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I realise that time is short for the debate, and that several hon. Members wish to take part, so I shall try to be as brief as I can. I will put four questions to the Minister, in the hope that he will be able to respond to them.

The first question, which has already been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and by the Minister, relates to the importance of technical conservation. I should like the Minister to say what stage he has reached in discussions with his European partners and the Commission in pursuing measures on technical conservation. In particular, my constituency fishermen are interested in square mesh panels, which they consider a sensible way forward. Those panels are cheap and effective, and their use is supported by the fishermen. I would be grateful if the Minister could say whether he has taken up such measures with the Commission, and what progress he made.

My second question echoes the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about the restructuring and modernising of older parts of the fleet. Have the Government any plans in that respect, and if so, exactly what are they? Are they working on measures to help to renew the older parts of the fleet?

My third question, which has already been raised, is what proposals the Minister has for solving the quota hopper problem. It is important that he should begin to share with the House some of his ideas on that issue, which is at the heart of the crisis we face in the industry at the moment.

In the light of the debacle over the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, it is important that the Minister shares his ideas with us at the earliest possible moment, so that we can discuss them and perhaps probe whether they offer our best solution. I remember the debates in Committee on the Merchant Shipping Act, when the Government's suggestions were criticised. The Government were told that their proposals simply would not work, and those criticisms have turned out to be absolutely valid. It is therefore important that the Minister does not charge ahead with his own ideas. He should share them with the House and the industry, which would then be better served.

My final question considers a group of people who have not been touched upon in the debate—those ordinary members of crews of fishing vessels that are decommissioned. The owners of those vessels get reasonably large sums of money from decommissioning, but those who have worked on those vessels for 10 or 20 years end up with nothing and just become unemployed.

When we consider the decommissioning package, we should also think about those ordinary crew members. We should think of measures to compensate those who are taken out of the industry through no fault of their own but simply because of its overall needs. I should be grateful if the Minister turned his mind to what can be done to help those ordinary crew members, who end up with nothing.

6.43 pm

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his robust speech, which will be applauded by my constituents. I do not see, however, how anyone of us can have any enthusiasm for the statutory instrument, because it will not achieve the objective we all desire.

We could double the size of the fishing fleet going out to sea, and there would be no danger to our fishing stocks if our fishermen were able to go back to the fishing methods of an earlier generation. Equally, we could more than halve our existing fishing fleet and the fleets of other Community countries, and our fishing stocks would be so depleted that we would cease to have a fishing industry of any consequence if we all went along with high-tech industrial fishing methods.

Industrial fishing methods are being rapidly adopted not just in Community waters but around the world, and they have become a curse on conservation. I repeat that it is a worldwide problem, but I wish that this country would take the lead, as it is uniquely qualified to do, not just in Europe but internationally, to alert the fishing industries to the fact that, unless we tackle industrial fishing methods and the evils it is bringing, we will have a grave ecological problem in our seas in quite a short time.

The problem of quota hopping has been mentioned forcibly by several hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who said that he had been arguing against it for 15 years. Surely the problem goes back to 1970, and the genesis of the common fisheries policy.

On the eve of our application to join the European Community, the Council of Ministers passed the regulation that enshrined the principle of equal access. It was therefore immaterial what country one came from, because one had equal access to all the waters. That principle was reaffirmed in 1976. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not in his place, because I intended to remind him that he was in the House then and supported his Government, which he did loyally in those days, on that issue. Given his absence, I had better say no more about it.

We should remember that the problem goes back a long time. We conceded the principle when we joined the Community in 1973. If we are to make any progress on quota hopping, that regulation of 1976 must be expunged. I hope that the Minister will confirm that; that he will keep it in mind; and that he will do his utmost to achieve that objective. If he fails to do so, perhaps even he will consider the necessity for not just a root-and-branch reform of the common fisheries policy but something even more radical.

6.47 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I do not wish to follow the point made by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), because he misunderstands the issue to the extent that the common fisheries policy is built on the concept of relative stability. It is the contradiction between quota hopping and relative stability that must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

This is an item for the intergovernmental conference, so we must know what exactly the Government propose to do. Some suggestions have been made, but no specific attempts have been made to identify the necessary approach. The Government will have my full support and that of my hon. Friends to achieve that end. The IGC has been going on for some weeks. I know that it is a lengthy process and that there is still time to discuss the issue. I understand that nothing will be decided in the discussions on Monday. I am not asking the Minister to show his negotiating hand, but he needs to reassure the industry that he is taking the issue seriously. He needs to put some flesh on the bones.

I support the statutory instrument for the reasons that everyone has explained. The relaxation of the eligibility criteria is welcome, and the prawner question, which was vexed and hard fought last year, has been dealt with. The industry is a lot happier. We would obviously be a lot happier if more decommissioning schemes were introduced, backed up with proper funding, for which we have argued for many years, at least since the late 1980s. I hope that the Government will continue to do what they can to increase the access to and eligibility for decommissioning schemes in the future.

I should like to refer to the Minister's comments on the multi-annual guidance programme. I was encouraged by the tone that he adopted on some issues. The Government are entitled to be robust about the relative position of the United Kingdom and the Commission on the MAGP. However, there is still much confusion about the exact targets and shortfall, about whether the deficit will be carried over and, if it is to be carried over, the consequences that that will have for MAGP3 and up to 2002.

I hope that, if the Minister has time, he will consider that matter. I was encouraged that he took such a robust attitude to the Lassen report and the Commission's announcement on that. A 40 per cent. reduction, even if it is over five or six years, is unacceptable, and hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed great anger about that. I add my weight to the frustration expressed by other hon. Members. We support the Government's opposition, and I hope that that will be continued robustly.

The two specific objections to Lassen have both been mentioned, but I mention them in passing. It is unacceptable to proceed with these issues without taking account of the effect of industrial fishing and the fact that this is a biologist's report; ridiculously, there is no socio-economic analysis and perspective. The Commission must understand that, if fishermen are not committed to the schemes, mechanisms and processes, if they do not accept their value in their innermost hearts, they will not work. We must work with the grain of the industry.

Sadly, there is no basis for equating a 40 per cent. reduction in catch with a 40 per cent. reduction in capacity.

I know that the Minister received no notice of the announcement by the Commissioner, but can we get together to try to create better consultation procedures for setting total allowable catch limits? This scheme has been better than most, but it needs to be improved more in future.

The issue of quota hopping is bound up with the concept of relative stability, and we shall support efforts to change the treaty to get the common fisheries policy and quota hopping better sorted out, but it is an IGC matter and the Government need to say more about what they will do about that.

I sound a note of warning about the potential difficulty of not agreeing to consider anything to do with the Lassen report until quota hoppers are dealt with; some people would be encouraged by that, because they have a vested interest in procrastinating on both those issues. The Government must be careful how they play that tactically. A treaty change on quota hopping is necessary, but even a treaty change—the Minister might confirm this—were it to be successful, and were the Government to win that argument, could be, as far as I can read from a legal point of view, only a prospective suggestion. What can we do about those who are already in the system, and why cannot the Government use some of the money available from the CFP in connection with third-country waters, to buy people out of quota hopping? That appears a simple, straightforward way in which to proceed.

I am very worried about the continuing aging process, which has dramatically increased in the past 10 years. Ridiculously, the average age of our vessels is now 25 years. The Government are putting their head in the sand and are not making use of some of the socio-economic funds that are available through the CFP, for scrap and build and for some pension provision for those who leave the system. There is much to be done. If the Government are robust in dealing with Lassen and quota hopping, they will receive my support and that of my hon. Friends.

6.53 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): This is one of those debates that happens all too rarely in the House, in which there is a virtual unanimity of view across the House from all parties, whatever view we have taken individually about our membership of the European Community in the past. Speeches such as those by my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) show the outrage that exists throughout the House. The passion that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives brought to bear in his speech shows that the patience of fishermen throughout the United Kingdom is very thin.

Mr. Harris: It has gone.

Mr. Brown: Indeed, it has gone.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I had the privilege of welcoming the Fisheries Minister to Great Grimsby a few weeks ago. There, despite the devastation that we have witnessed in the fishing industry in the past two decades, there was a buoyancy with the opening of the new fish market—yet suddenly Commissioner Bonino knocks that confidence. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has responded so robustly, and I hope that he will pass on the

message from the House, from all the political parties, that there is outrage about the manner and tone in which she made those announcements.

I fear that, if we fail to sort out this issue, fishermen's patience with the common fisheries policy, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives said, has gone, will never return. Our patience on both sides of the House with the common fisheries policy will then go, the public's confidence in the common fisheries policy will go—if it has not gone already—and there will be a massive upwelling of public feeling, as we look at beef and as we look at fish, which will cause the public to ask the purpose of our membership of the European Community.

In the referendum in 1975, I voted against our entry into the European Community. In the past two decades, however, I bought the view that the issue was resolved once and for all—that that was it, we had had our say, the people of Britain had had their say and it was time to acknowledge that, for better or for worse, we were in the European Community and had to make the best of its institutions.

I have gone along with that view pretty well for the past 20 years. In 1986, I did vote against the Single European Act, but I bought the general view that, for better or for worse, we have been in the European Community and we must make those institutions work with regard to fish, the common agricultural policy and so on.

I do not want the House ever to have to come to consider our withdrawal from the European Community, but it will, I suspect, be an issue such as fish that will be the straw that breaks the camel's back with regard to the patience of the people out there and of the fishermen out there.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby and I constantly attend meetings with the shadow Fisheries Minister, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). The fishermen we meet ask us what the benefit is of being in the common fisheries policy. We say to them that, unfortunately, for better or for worse, that is the structure under which we must operate at present; that is where the negotiations must take place. The fishermen's response shows that they are starting to wonder what is in the common fisheries policy for them. The concept may have been a good idea, but currently it impinges very unfairly on our British fishermen.

I am delighted with the robust view that my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in the Government have taken. I am sure that they are not countenancing failure, but if they are unable to deliver what I know that they will negotiate for, our continued membership of the European Community will be called into question. I therefore wish my hon. Friend every success, because much more hangs on a successful outcome of the negotiations than our ability to deal with this problem. I believe that, as we reach the end of this century, whatever Government are in power, the issue of fish will determine the national attitude to whether our continued membership of the European Community is a good thing.

6.58 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I regret that I have not tabled an amendment, because it would be nice to have a longer debate, as we should now ask questions, and call in question the basis of the decommissioning policy. I am aware that Labour Members supported it for a long time before the Government did anything, but that delay has created a whole new ball game. It is a ball game in which the British industry is now being asked to decommission on what will be a massive scale if we cut 19 per cent. over the effort targets by the end of this year, then 40 per cent. by 2002, effectively to make room for Spanish vessels in our waters, to make more space for large, modernised, efficient European fleets, and to make more room for quota hoppers on our register.

The other European countries have reached their multi-annual guidance programme targets by flagging their vessels under the British flag. Under the MAGP targets up to the end of 1991, Spain had to reduce its effort by 2.2 per cent. It registered 3 per cent. of its fleet as British to catch our fish. The Dutch had to reduce their effort by 16 per cent., so they put 6 per cent. of the fleet under the British flag. We now carry the burden and have to reduce our effort because of that reflagging. Jim Porteous of the south-west fisheries producers organisation has calculated that the flag of convenience vessels are now catching £82 million-worth of our fish in our waters and landing it in European ports. That is why we now face this huge reduction of effort and it is one of the reasons why we should call into question the decommissioning process.

There are other reasons for calling that process into question. I have seen the Grimsby fleet drastically reduced. It is heart-rending, because it is one of the most conservation-conscious and efficient fleets in the country. It uses a larger mesh size than most other fleets and the vessels are older. They are seine netters, which is not an efficient method of fishing. It is not the vacuum cleaner method, scooping up everything. It is conservation-effective. We need more inefficient fishing, so that the fishermen catch larger fish, leaving the smaller fish to be caught later. We are taking the most conservation- effective vessels out through the decommissioning scheme, and that is wrong.

Another reason why we should question the decommissioning scheme was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). The decommissioning proposals do nothing for the share fishermen. They are losing their jobs as the vessel is being laid up, but nothing is being done for them. I asked the Minister why the Government did not accept the European proposal—I am not advocating accepting European proposals en masse—to part-fund an early retirement scheme and a compensation scheme for fishermen on decommissioned boats. The Government said that they preferred that to be taken care of by national social security measures.

However, because we are talking about share fishermen who work on a self-employed basis, there is nothing for them when their vessel is decommissioned. They are losing their livelihood, but there is no redundancy pay and no help or support for them. If we are to have effective decommissioning, it is essential that something should be done for the fishermen—the poor bloody infantry of the industry. It is time that something was done.

We are asked to make cuts in our effort to the end of this year, as a prelude to what the Commissioner told us might be a cut of 40 per cent. in the British effort. That is ludicrous and totally unacceptable. I am delighted that the Minister is committed to working against it. I want to tell him that the only way in which it can be resisted is

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

by calling into question the basis of equal access to a common resource on which the common fisheries policy rests. If we accept that principle, it follows as night follows day that there will be cuts pari passu across the board.

It is ludicrous that we who bring the most fish into the so-called Common Market pool—about 75 per cent. of the stock—should be asked to take the biggest cuts in our fishing effort. We are being asked to make a cut of over half. The only way to resist it is to say that the cuts should be in inverse ratio to the contribution made to the stocks. If we contribute the most stocks, we should take the lowest cuts. Spain, which has a massive fleet and no fishing waters, should take the biggest cuts. That is the only logical and acceptable way to do it.

We are reaching the end of the line. The Government have come to us bleating about the benefits of the CFP, but have done nothing for the industry except watch it be restructured by liquidation. They must stop the quota hoppers, which means an assault on that principle. They must get greater powers for the territorial states, so that we can protect our stocks and not see them stolen by other vessels. They must end the equal access. That is the only way to defend British fishing and to see some improvement. I offer the Government the principles contained in my Bill—the Fishery Limits (Amendment) Bill—which does all those things. I hope that they will look at it.

7.4 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I agree almost entirely with what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I go along with much of what was said by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I agree particularly with the feeling of resentment about the stocks caught by the quota hoppers. That must be addressed.

I want to make one specific point that has not been covered in the debate so far. Rather unusually, my point involves the banking system in Scotland. The banks play a major part in the fishing industry because they lend finance to the fishermen so that they can obtain the boats that they take to sea. We recognise that the fleets are aging and that in the future there will be a need for the banks to provide support if we are to increase the potential of our vessels and improve safety factors, with fishermen going to sea in modern vessels.

The problem is the way in which the decommissioning scheme will be implemented. Fishermen will have to have their documents handed in and the vessels scrapped by the end of October. Thereafter, there is a 30-day gap to the time when cheques will be handed over. I am advised that at that time, the banks lose security on that element of cash. That is not acceptable to them. It would add costs to the industry in the future if it were to be permitted and if people defaulted on their bank loans.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am sorry that that technicality has arisen so late, but I shall ask my officials to discuss it with the banks concerned as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend. That is the assurance I sought, and I shall now sit down.

7.6 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I welcome the co-operation that is allowing all hon. Members with fishing interests to participate in the debate. Every fishing debate is controversial, and an hour and a half is not sufficient time for such a debate.

I want to make three points. We all agree that the common fisheries policy is a busted flush and should be changed fundamentally. There are three areas that destabilise the CFP. The first is the flag of convenience vessels, and that point has been mentioned many times. I remember the Merchant Shipping Bill back in 1988, when the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and I proposed amendments to toughen the conditions placed on flag of convenience vessels. At that time, despite the fact that that legislation was their fourth attempt to deal with the issue, the Government told us that everything was in order and that they had the matter in hand. They told us that our amendments were no good. Whether the amendments were good or bad, they could not have been any worse than the Government's attempts in that Bill.

The issue is now to go before the intergovernmental conference. There is a point that I want the Minister to think about. As I understand the policy of non-co-operation, everything is to be vetoed regardless of whether it is good or bad. Even if treaty changes on flags of convenience vessels were achievable, am I correct in believing that they would be vetoed by the United Kingdom? The Minister seems to be shaking his head, but as I understand the policy, everything is to be vetoed regardless of whether the United Kingdom supports it. The Minister should address that.

The second issue that destabilised the CFP was Spanish access to western waters six years before it was provided for in Spain's treaty of accession. This morning, *The Times* said:

> "Spain's unexpected decision to vote in favour of lifting the embargo on British bovine by-products may have been taken in the hope of a future quid pro quo with Britain on fishing rights."

We have been here before. There have been Council meetings at which Spain suddenly decided to vote for the United Kingdom's position on qualified majority voting. We then found out that the fishing industry had been sold down the river as part of that bargain. Would the Minister care to deny the report in *The Times* this morning that Spain's decision to side with the United Kingdom might have something to do with its interest in fishing matters?

Mr. Baldry: I have absolutely no idea where that story came from, and it bears no relation to the truth. Spain changed its view because it saw our eradication document, and it was able to support us on that basis.

Mr. Salmond: I look forward to the Minister's letter to *The Times*, in which he will doubtless give us the details of the dirty deal that was done with Spain three years ago, which gave it accelerated access. The Minister shakes his head, but I have heard the same point made by Conservative Members.

The third factor that has destabilised the common fisheries policy is the quota allocation. The Minister, rightly, in his short term of office has been directed to technical conservation, square-mesh panels and industrial fishing as alternative methods of conservation. We all accept that quota allocation is fine at times of abundant

fishery, but when the fishery becomes tight, the quota allocation becomes perverse as a conservation policy. Many Opposition Members have put the arguments for square-mesh panels and industrial fishing to many of the Minister's predecessors for many years, but we have yet to see effective action pursued and taken.

I know that the Minister has been engaged in the dramatic consultation process in the past few months. I wish him well, but I hope that his declarations on and interest in questions of technical conservation are carried through into serious argument in the Council of Ministers.

I, too, welcome the Minister's tough talk on fishing this evening, but I have seen his predecessors come and go. They all, including the UK Fisheries Minister—as the Minister described himself—said that they would act tough and change their ways on the common fisheries policy. Yet they all went to the Council of Ministers and did not talk tough there. If they did, that did not have any effect because they acted like lambs.

The consistent feature of United Kingdom fishing policy has been to subordinate fishing to other interests in the European Union. That is why Spain, which is in the CFP, secured a good deal and Norway, from outside the CFP, secured a good deal. Fishing is an absolute priority of policy for both countries. Only when a Minister can come to the Dispatch Box and promise the House that fishing will be an absolute priority will he have any chance of success in European negotiations.

7.11 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The statutory instrument covers the period up to the end of this year, but the decommissioning will not stop there and further proposals are in the pipeline. The debate has revolved not around the instrument but around those further proposals.

The social and economic structure of the areas affected by fleet reductions has been well explored in the past and needs no repetition, other than to say that if the Irish sea fleet had to cut its catch by 40 per cent., the present onshore infrastructure simply could not be sustained, because the throughput of fish would be so low as to make the whole operation uneconomic. I am sure that that also applies elsewhere.

The fishermen in Northern Ireland are astonished by the latest proposals, because they know that some species are abundant in the fishery at present, including haddock, herring and prawns. That was apparently also the view of the scientists until the turn of the year, but those early opinions seem to have been set aside despite the fact that the prawn fishery was increased by some 3,000 tonnes.

It now seems that a massive cut is being demanded because the Community has taken a global view of all EC fisheries and has made cuts on that basis instead of considering individual species or fishing areas. That is not acceptable to the fishing industry, those who represent it in the House or the country at large. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that it was not acceptable to the Government. I hope that the Government will reject the cuts that have been demanded and opt for a policy tailored to each area and species.

It is clear that the UK has suffered disproportionately from the changes made over the years, and there has been a huge reduction in the fleet in Northern Ireland already. We shall now be asked to give still more. It is time for a radical change of policy, because the Northern Ireland fleet and those elsewhere in the United Kingdom have shrunk far enough.

Something must be done about quota hopping. Much has been said about quota hopping, but something must also be done about the privileged position created for the Irish Republic by the Hague preference system, which has not been mentioned so far. I shall not go into details, but the facts will be well known to fishermen and all those who represent fishing constituencies. Those problems need immediate resolution and even more immediate is the need to fulfil the Government's pledge that the Irish sea Hague preference losses would be made good by international quota swaps.

In the longer term, we need to clarify whether the Government accept the draft report of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on fisheries, issued in early May, which discussed decommissioning and reducing activity and catchability. In short, the question the document raises is whether the EC should have a small fishing fleet with a high catch capacity per vessel and utilise it fully—apparently that would be technically easy, because many vessels are tied up—or whether it should be satisfied with many more but less efficient vessels that would keep more people at work at sea and also more small fishing ports open. That needs careful consideration, because the smaller one-rig boats that fish for prawns ensure a steady year-round supply of prawns and steady employment. The larger, more efficient boats provide more seasonal supply and employment.

The report states:

"Measures to reduce activity and catchability will improve the willingness of fishermen to leave the industry".

If applied, that would lead to a policy that squeezed the individual fisherman financially to the point at which he was not able to catch sufficient fish to keep his operation viable and would therefore be forced to take a small sum in compensation and leave the industry. Is that unacceptable policy precisely the result that the demand for a further 40 per cent. cut is intended to achieve?

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): I am grateful to hon. Members for their wide-ranging contributions to what has once again, and rightly, turned out to be an impassioned debate. The fishing industry is a vital part of our national life and is at the heart of the constituencies of many hon. Members who have spoken today. I am proud to include myself among them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) said, and whatever the difference in views, I believe that the whole House yearns to see a viable and profitable UK fishing industry that husbands the natural resources surrounding these islands and harvests those natural resources on a sustainable basis. The fish stocks on which our fishing industry relies are heavily over-exploited. Failure to tackle overfishing exposes the fishing industry to an increasing risk that those stocks will simply disappear, and that must never be allowed to happen.

On the subject of the multi-annual guidance programme, the House has shown its real concern about the scale of the possible capacity reductions that the Commission is now seeking to achieve by 2002. I shall

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

repeat the comments made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State and make it clear to all hon. Members that there is no prospect of our decommissioning a third of the UK trawler fleet over the next three years, as Mrs. Bonino has suggested, but there is still a need for us to help remove from the fleet those vessels that are becoming increasingly unviable. Only in that way can we safeguard the future of the remaining fleet, place it on a more viable footing and reduce the incentive to overfish. That is why the Government propose to spend a further £13 million under the scheme before the House.

There is no doubt that we need to reduce fishing effort for the future of the industry. The question is not whether, but how and to what extent different parts of the European Community fishing fleets should reduce their fishing activity. Of course, as the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, we do not need to proceed by decommissioning alone. The fleet can be reduced in other ways.

For example, although there is not much agreement in the industry, I know that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is increasingly willing to contemplate restrictions on time at sea. I commend that thinking and I look forward to the UK industry acting responsibly and making known its detailed considerations of the Commission's proposals as we discuss them in the months ahead. I stress again that, in their present form, the proposals are unacceptable to the industry and to the Government.

Many hon. Members mentioned quota hopping, especially my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). Of course, there is no point in spending UK taxpayers' money to decommission fishing vessels if other member states can continue to export their own surplus capacity on to our fishing register. It is vital that action is taken to close that loophole, which is exploited by quota hoppers. It would be intolerable if we were to scrap UK vessels, for them simply to be replaced by flag boats from other member states fishing against UK quotas. Although we took action to try to remedy that problem in 1989, our action was struck down by the European Court—the same European Court that many Opposition Front Benchers would sell their souls to serve.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear the Government's resolve to tackle the quota hopping problem at the intergovernmental conference. He made that point forcefully in his useful meeting with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Aberdeen last month. We envisage that our proposals will take the form of a protocol to the treaty, which recognises that national quotas allocated under the common fisheries policy are to be used for the benefit of national fishing communities. The protocol will be designed to allow individual member states to adopt measures to ensure that there are real economic links between their fishing communities and the vessels that fish their quotas.

As my hon Friend the Minister of State said, the European Commission cannot be surprised that the UK fishing industry and the Government are unwilling to contemplate any further programmes of reductions in the UK fleet as long as the problem of quota hoppers remains to be solved.

Under the common fisheries policy, UK quotas are for the benefit of UK fishing communities, not for the benefit of fishermen from other member states. Fishing makes a vital contribution to the wealth of fishery-dependent areas, which are often in remote parts of our country where the scope for diversification is limited. It is our job to ensure that that contribution is properly safeguarded and secured.

Some hon. Members asked about technical conservation and progress. I acknowledge the positive role that is played by our fishing industry and the fisheries conservation group. They have agreed a package of measures which, if adopted, should help to reduce discards and improve the state of some of the stocks on which our fishermen depend. We have passed details to the Commission and will press it to present its proposals as quickly as possible. Of course, we shall update the House on that.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) asked a series of questions relating to his constituency. I shall write to him with detailed replies.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): It is obvious that the Minister is running out of material with which to respond to the debate. I have a basic question. There have been consistent references to decommissioning and to how we can reach the multi-annual guidance programme. Can the Minister state the exact UK tonnage, because three different figures have been published in the past month?

Mr. Robertson: Obviously, there is confusion about that, and so that there is no ambiguity, my hon. Friend the Minister of State will write to the hon. Lady and to other hon. Members.

Some hon. Members mentioned a decommissioning scheme specifically for quota hoppers. There are 150 quota hoppers in the UK fleet, representing one fifth of the tonnage of our offshore fleet.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I should like to intervene before the Minister moves too far from his response to the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who made a valid point about the early retirement scheme and the Government's opposition to it. Will the Minister assure the House that the Government will look again at introducing the scheme, in view of the considerable hardship faced by some fishermen?

Mr. Robertson: As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, there is a variety of other schemes, such as FIFG and PESCA. As she presses me to have a second look at the matter, I am happy to assure her that I shall do so.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

Clearly, if we were able to decommission the 150 quota hoppers, it would go a long way towards meeting any targets for capacity reductions. Of course, there is nothing to prevent quota hopper owners from applying for decommissioning grants under the scheme before the House. Some quota hoppers were decommissioned under previous schemes. A special scheme targeting them would

be quite different, and I am not sure that fishermen would take kindly to our spending large sums of public money to buy them out.

Even if it were possible to devise such a scheme, some difficult issues would need to be resolved. Should arrangements be voluntary or compulsory, and what steps should be taken to prevent the owners of decommissioned vessels buying back into the UK fleet? How could we be sure that the quota that was released by the decommissioning of such vessels benefited UK vessels and interests? Those and other matters would have to be carefully considered.

Mr. Salmond: If I were the Minister, I would not burn my bridges about buying out quota hoppers. I would introduce some flexibility. The Minister said that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation supported days at sea measures. Will he make it clear that they would not be an addition but in exchange for a relaxation of the quota regime?

Mr. Robertson: Of course they are not. I am not ruling out the idea of buying out quota hoppers—far from it—but our fishermen would want satisfactory answers to a series of technical and important questions before we went down that road. I am trying to flag up some of the questions and issues that would have to be discussed with the industry and sorted out. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that. Although we have no plans for a scheme at present, I am not willing to rule it out. Indeed, I am willing to look at it with our industry.

The measure will, I hope, make a valuable contribution to improving the operation of the UK fleet. As the Minister of State said, there have been a number of changes in the criteria compared with the 1995 scheme, and they are all designed to make it more effective. I am glad that the House has been able to welcome the widening of the scheme, which will allow more vessel owners to apply.

We have had a full and useful debate. The proposed scheme will make a modest but valuable contribution towards restructuring the UK fishing fleet and safeguarding its future and that of the fish stocks on which it depends. I have no hesitation in commending the scheme to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1242), dated 7th May 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th May, be approved.

Parliamentary Proceedings (Welsh)

7.25 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That, whilst English is and should remain the language of this House, the use of Welsh be permitted in parliamentary proceedings held in Wales, subject to the conditions set out in the Third Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 387).

We have emptied the Chamber of Scotsmen and filled it with Welshmen.

I shall begin by explaining why, to his great regret, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is unable to be present. As my right hon. Friend is not here, my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) will reply to the debate. I know that that will be understood by Welsh Members, but I thought that I should put it on the record because the same problem has led to the leading party spokesmen for other parties in Wales being unable to be here.

They have a good reason. The Secretary of State and the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) are tonight taking part in a long-arranged public debate in Wales, probably in English, on constitutional issues affecting Wales. It is clearly an important occasion and they all felt that they should be present. We all understand that, and I am sorry that we were not able to arrange parliamentary business in a more convenient way for them. I can testify from my conversations with the Secretary of State for Wales that he has asked me to make clear his strong personal support for the proposal.

The House will recall that, on 11 March, we agreed seven new Standing Orders enabling the Welsh Grand Committee to play an enhanced role in the parliamentary consideration of Welsh affairs by dealing with a wider range of business and holding meetings in Wales. During consultation on the draft Standing Orders and in the debate, representations were made that the use of the Welsh language should be allowed in the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee when it met in Wales.

I made it clear to the House in, I hope, a characteristically conciliatory way during the earlier debate that the Government did not think that those representations could be dismissed. After all, we are the Administration who carried through the Welsh Language Act 1993, which established the principle that, in the conduct of public business in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated equally.

As I said in our earlier debate on the matter, it was clear that a decision to allow the use of Welsh in parliamentary proceedings would be a major change in practice on which the House ought to take a view when the issues of principle and practicality had been thoroughly investigated. Accordingly, I invited the Procedure Committee whose distinguished Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is in his place and who was slightly taken by surprise when he read the report of our earlier debate, to consider the matter and to report to the House as soon as possible.

My right hon. Friend and his colleagues kindly accepted that unexpected and unannounced remit and have discharged it with admirable speed although they

[Mr. Tony Newton]

were engaged in several other inquiries at the same time. It is appropriate to express on behalf of the House, and not only Welsh Members, our gratitude to my right hon. Friend and the members of the Committee for that. I am moving the motion to give the House an opportunity to decide on the Committee's recommendations.

First, English is the language in which the proceedings of this House are conducted, as it is the only language that all hon. Members are assumed to understand. The Procedure Committee rested firmly on that principle for proceedings here, and recommended that the House should affirm that principle in a resolution.

In that connection, I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) for his courtesy in giving me notice of some points that he wanted me to cover on the possible uses of languages other than English. This may be an appropriate time for me to pick them up. He asked about the appropriateness or, indeed, orderliness of using Latin and Greek and Chaucerian English. The advice that I have on that is that it would be for the Speaker—or you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to decide whether to allow an hon. Member to use a quotation in Latin, Greek or Chaucerian English during a speech in the House without providing a translation.

I gather that, unfortunately, no hon. Members of the present House—certainly not me—heard Lord Palmerston get himself out of a tight corner in the "Don Pacifico" debate in 1850, which I remember learning about in my boyhood, with a peroration that included the phrase:

"Civis Britannicus sum",

which I hasten to translate, to be sure that I am in order, as:

"I am a British citizen".

I do not think that anyone would take exception to the use of Latin in that case, but as a general rule we might do well to follow the practice of Sir Winston Churchill, who on one occasion, when he had made a telling point in a speech with a Latin quotation, followed it up instantly with a translation into English. I suspect, however, that his purpose was not to keep in order but rather to make a different point, because in introducing the English version he said that it was "for the benefit of any Etonians who may be present".

I move rapidly from Latin, Greek and Chaucerian English to the second question raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, who noticed, no doubt, that I mentioned during the debate in March that Norman French was still used in the other place when Royal Assent is signified to Acts of Parliament by Commission. The formula used—I have heard it many times—is "La Reyne le veult".

Norman French is also used by the Clerks, I am told—I did not know this before—in the endorsements that are written on Bills as they pass from one House to the other. I see the Clerk nodding—*[Interruption.]* Is he not nodding? Perhaps he is not allowed to nod, but I am sure that I saw him nodding first. Norman French, although spoken in that one instance in the other place, is never spoken in the House. I hope that that is sufficient guidance for what has been the practice.

The last point that the hon. Gentleman raised with me can best be illustrated by referring to the speech that was made to a joint gathering of both Houses of Parliament by President Chirac recently, which many hon. Members present will have heard, and which was, of course, delivered in French. The point is that it is quite usual for visiting Heads of State and Heads of Government to deliver such addresses in their own language, but these are ceremonial occasions that do not form part of the proceedings of the House, so the normal rules do not apply. I hope that that is sufficient comment on the points that the hon. Gentleman raised.

I return to the main purpose of the motion, which asks us to reaffirm that English is the language used for the proceedings of the House. The Procedure Committee was none the less satisfied that the Welsh language enjoys a special status in Wales, already recognised in law through the Welsh Language Act 1993, which provides a sound basis for agreeing a narrow derogation from the general rule concerning English to allow the use of Welsh in parliamentary proceedings in Wales. The motion gives effect to that recommendation.

Finally, the motion approves the conditions for the use of Welsh, which the Procedure Committee has recommended. The principal condition is that facilities for simultaneous interpretation from Welsh into English should be provided for the benefit of non-Welsh speakers. The Committee's advice is that such facilities can be hired at relatively modest cost; indeed, a number of the venues that might be used for meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee are already appropriately equipped, as one would expect, particularly since the passage of the Welsh Language Act.

The Committee also made a number of practical recommendations, which the motion invites the House to endorse: that hon. Members proposing to speak in Welsh should give notice to the Chairman; that hon. Members should not switch from one language to the other in the course of a speech; and that direct communications between the Chairman and an hon. Member, such as points of order, and communications with members of staff, should be in English. As the report makes clear, all those recommendations are made for practical reasons.

The motion would apply not only to the Welsh Grand Committee, but to any meetings of the Welsh Affairs Committee and, indeed, other Select Committees that may meet in Wales. The Procedure Committee has recommended a set of guidelines—again of a practical character—that should govern the hearing of oral evidence in the Welsh language.

Mr. William Ross: The right hon. Gentleman will understand that some of us have been listening to him with great interest. When the proceedings are published, which will be the definitive text—the English or the Welsh?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will comment. The report recommends that, where somebody has given notice that they wish to speak in Welsh, they will be required to provide an English translation, which will then be the official record. I think that that is the suggestion. Does my right hon. Friend wish to intervene at this point?

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Perhaps I can come to the aid of the House. All parliamentary papers have always

been published in English, and the publication of all parliamentary and Committee papers will continue to be in English.

Mr. Newton: I hope that my right hon. Friend's intervention is helpful to the hon. Gentleman. It was certainly helpful to me. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

If the House approves the motion, the way will be clear for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to introduce proposals for a programme of meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee at suitable locations in Wales. In view of the undoubted success of the reforms of the Scottish Grand Committee that the Government have introduced, I am sure that all Welsh Members will be looking forward eagerly to these developments.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Can we ensure that there is no misconception? My understanding from the Procedure Committee's recommendations is that, if an hon. Member wishes to speak Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales, he is not obliged to provide a translation, as a translation will automatically be provided and transmitted by the translators and the equipment. That should be clearly understood here and now.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I can clear up the misinterpretation that I gave by accident just now. When re-reading material on this issue shortly before I came into the Chamber, the last thing that I read was the evidence given by the Editor of *Hansard*, who I think made the suggestion to which I referred. I apologise to the House for confusing that evidence, which was fairly fresh in my mind, with the report's recommendations, which have been clearly explained by my right hon. Friend and by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I hope that that helps to remove the misunderstanding to which I inadvertently contributed.

In conclusion, I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales in his endorsement of the Procedure Committee's recommendations. I commend the motion to the House.

7.37 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I add to the apologies that were given by the Leader of the House for the absence of the Secretary of State, the shadow Secretary of State and the other two party leaders from Wales, who are in Cardiff tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who is shadow Leader of the House, has asked me to reply, which would not usually occur, but she is otherwise engaged. She has given notice of her absence to the Leader of the House.

The Opposition welcome the Procedure Committee's recommendations. We also welcome the speed with which it carried out its work, its professionalism and that of the witnesses and those who offered written evidence, the Clerks and others, so that it was able to reach the recommendations that we are debating.

I cavil at two of the Committee's recommendations, but just for the purposes of debate and so that the House may give those matters some thought. It occurs to me that the proposed formal declaration that English is the language of the House of Commons, other than for the Welsh Grand Committee when sitting in Wales, is much against the traditions of the House. Such a declaration is almost a first step along the road to a written constitution.

It reminds anyone with an interest in Welsh history of the 1536 Act of Union, which applied to Wales a rule that never applied in England—that anyone from Wales who wanted to take part in public business, such as the law or Parliament, must do so in the English language. A person would have been at liberty to use another language in England, but not in Wales, because fear of the Welsh language prompted a formal declaration. The House should consider whether it would be better to do without a formal declaration, as such is against the traditions of the House—which permits things to be done by evolution and the rules of pragmatism.

As to the use of Norman French in limited circumstances, the Leader of the House did not address what would happen if the House were to make a formal declaration that no language other than English could be used in our proceedings. Would Norman French be disallowed? We do not necessarily want to lose those odd bits of Norman French that are used here and there in our formal proceedings, so it might be better to avoid a formal declaration—or at least give serious thought to the implications before making one.

Mr. Newton: There may be some small misunderstanding. The only use of Norman French in the proceedings of Parliament that is formally recorded is in the other place, so it cannot be affected by a resolution made in this House. However, the Clerks also make use of Norman French in passing Bills between the two Houses.

Mr. Morgan: That calls into question whether the Clerks would be permitted, if a formal declaration were made, to use Norman French for their purposes.

My other concern is whether a speech made partly in Welsh and partly in English would be debarred. *Hansard* has said that that should not be allowed, and although I understand the reasons, I am not certain that it is wise to make such a definite rule. I appreciate that *Hansard* wants maximum notice, which is absolutely fair, so that it can check that an interpreter is available, but the general principle followed in respect of the proceedings of the House—I speak from personal experience—should take account of the relevance of the language to the topic, not the convenience of the service provided by *Hansard*.

I am not saying that I am dismissing the practical concerns of *Hansard*. Nevertheless, if an hon. Member were to be speaking on the subject of agriculture and wanted to move on from the common agricultural policy wheat subsidy to the BSE crisis in the beef herds of Wales, since most beef farmers in Wales happen to be Welsh-speaking, the hon. Member might want to change at that point to the use of Welsh. If a Front Bencher were speaking on a range of education matters, he might say in the last five minutes, "I want to conclude on the position of Welsh medium schools in Wales." Interested outsiders would be happier hearing about that in Welsh.

It is the tradition of the House first to try something and, if it causes a problem, to reach agreement with the services provided to the House. If something proves impracticable, it is banned because it has been proved not to work. I understand that principle is known as solvitur ambulando—an ancient phrase that I had never heard until

[Mr. Morgan]

a couple of hours ago, when I read that it was used by Lord Howe of Aberavon when he gave evidence to the Public Service Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I would be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman would tell us the meaning of that phrase.

Mr. Morgan: Having explained who said it and where, I was about to say that it means, "It will solve itself at a walking pace." I am glad to have acted in an educational capacity for the benefit of the Deputy Speaker, as Lord Howe did for me when I read that reference in the Library's helpful briefing for tonight's debate.

I have practical experience of speaking in both English and Welsh at Labour party conferences in Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): At the same time?

Mr. Morgan: No—consecutively, not concurrently. That did not seem to cause problems for the audience, but there was no question of interpretation. I have also spoken in Welsh in at least one national Labour party conference, and I recall that the present Member of the European Parliament for Mid and West Wales—my former constituent Miss Eluned Morgan, who is no relation—made part of her speech to the Brighton conference in Welsh and the rest in English. She could not have given her speech entirely in Welsh, but it did not seem unreasonable for her to speak in Welsh for three minutes.

The practicalities of using Welsh in a political context do not seem to cause problems, and if doing so makes sense, *Hansard* should fit the occasion rather than hon. Members having to fit *Hansard*—although I do not wish to sound as though *Hansard* writers can perform tricks, stand on their heads and write double Dutch at the same time. I know that there are limits to what they can do, but *Hansard* should serve our practical needs. If it makes sense for hon. Members to speak Welsh because of the nature of the topic, that preference should be given more attention. The Procedure Committee may simply have decided, "Okay, if that's what *Hansard* says are the practical modalities of allowing Welsh to be spoken in the Welsh Grand Committee, we must do exactly what *Hansard* wants in every respect." Which is what the Committee has done.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): As someone who served on a council that was bilingual until its abolition earlier this year, I appreciate—as a monoglot Yorkshireman—the concerns that *Hansard* may have. There is no need for concern because speeches made in Welsh will be interpreted. If the *Hansard* writers cannot understand a speech and do their job, how will monoglot members of the Welsh Grand Committee understand what is being said? There is some criticism implied of the interpretation facilities. I can assure *Hansard* as a monoglot Yorkshireman—my hon. Friend has the benefit of being bilingual—that interpretation facilities throughout Wales are excellent. *Hansard* will be able to do its job, as will monoglot members of the Welsh Grand Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that interventions in any language should be short and precise.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. If Dyfed county council could interpret my hon. Friend's "Ee bah gum" into Welsh, I am sure that *Hansard* can do just as well with Welsh interpreted into English for the purposes of the record.

Incidentally, I was interested to hear the interventions of Northern Ireland Members, and I was glad to see in his place earlier my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), because their presence is relevant.

It was as late as 1906 before a Speaker ruled that English was to be the main language of the House of Commons, and only because of a challenge by an Irish nationalist Member of Parliament from west Kerry who attempted to make a speech in the Chamber in Irish Gaelic. The Speaker at the time made the point—as did the Leader of the House in his intervention—that the proceedings of the House have been conducted entirely in English for the past 600 years. He went one stage further and said that the House's proceedings had always been in English, which is not true. The House started out as a trilingual Parliament, with proceedings in English, French and Latin. In a fluid, pragmatic, I hesitate to say solvitur ambulando way, the English language gradually took over from Latin and French, probably by about 1450.

Naturally—and I notice some Euro-sceptic Members here tonight—after the original Norman conquest, the opening of the hundred years war in about 1350 caused this place to become more aggressively English. I hope that we are not about to start another hundred years war with the continent—you never know. The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) probably thinks that we have started such a war.

The use of French started to decrease and the use of English increased. Strangely, however, as the use of English went up, all words with any conceptual significance were borrowed from the French, so by the time English had replaced French, French had been incorporated into English. Words such as procedure, committee, parliament, government and constitution were all borrowed from French. Single-syllable words were of Anglo-Saxon or English origin, and all the two, three or four-syllable words were of French origin because that had been the language of the upper and ruling classes. That is how English became the flexible language that it is today.

The other great irony about the fear of the Welsh language, which causes Speakers to say, as one did in 1906, "We want to say for definite that the English language is the primary language of the House," is that, by the time the House—having started out on a trilingual basis when it was an England-only Parliament and did not cover Wales, Scotland or Ireland, north or south—became a monoglot English Parliament, it covered initially Wales and then Scotland and Ireland. It was a monoglot English Parliament precisely when it was starting to incorporate the Celtic languages, which might have been relevant in the wish to continue on a trilingual or even quadrilingual

basis, not with French and Latin, but with Welsh, Scots Gaelic and Irish Gaelic possibly permitted in special circumstances, as we are discussing tonight.

I hope that the House will warmly endorse the Procedure Committee's recommendation to continue a pragmatic approach to this matter. Rather than issuing firm rules about what shall and shall not be done, we should think about how we handle the problems. This is a British Parliament, not solely a Parliament for England and, therefore, we must incorporate and be flexible enough to allow the use, where appropriate, of languages other than English when covering Welsh business.

7.52 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for his kind remarks. I suggest that they are applicable mainly to my Committee members, because they have worked solidly to get this through, assisting me in the recommendations that we have made to the House. I am pleased at the speed with which our report has been taken by the House. I urge all Welsh Members to use their influence on their leaders to ensure that other Procedure Committee reports are debated as quickly as this one. I would have liked a "Hear, hear" from Opposition Members on that matter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Thank you very much.

I must emphasise absolutely that one of the problems that the Procedure Committee had from the start was the concept that this would be a foot, or perhaps even a toe, in the door, which would lead to possible demands for the Welsh language to be used in Parliament in Westminster. To ensure that that was not acceptable to the House generally or to the vast majority of hon. Members, we emphasised that

"the language of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is English: it has been English for many centuries; and it should in our view remain English."

I am sorry if the term "British" would be more convenient, but even in America the language is accepted as being English and I hope that that would be acceptable even to the Welsh. We moved in a specific direction because the special status of the Welsh language in Wales, as enshrined in the Welsh Language Act 1993, did not apply to parliamentary proceedings. It was specifically for that purpose that the Procedure Committee investigated and examined the matter.

There are reasons for our being specific about our proposition about English. The Labour party spokesman, the hon. Member—I was going to say that he was my hon. Friend—for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) pointed out the possibilities of Norman French and other languages. To meet perhaps that point, we are concerned that there should not be an approach that Urdu should be used because it covers certain people whose natural language is Urdu, or that Gaelic should be used in relation to other people in this country. Therefore, we have made that absolutely definite. I hope that the House, in the resolution as set out by the Leader of the House, which I hope will be passed, makes it definite that Welsh is to be used specifically for Welsh parliamentary proceedings in Wales.

Another helpful basis for allowing this is the amount of translation equipment that exists in many of the places where Welsh Committees meet in Wales. It appeared to the Procedure Committee to be nonsense not to be able to use translation facilities in a county council or a chamber if Welsh Members demanded to speak in Welsh.

We did, however, make it clear that Members should use one language alone, whether in interventions or in speeches. That is specifically to assist both the Chairman and the Committee Clerks in ensuring that they understand what the proceedings are and realise it from the word go.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): In the spirit of co-operation and in assisting the right hon. Gentleman, may I ask him this question? If there were a debate in Wales, an hon. Member were addressing the Welsh Grand Committee in Welsh, the Committee were adjourned and the remainder of the sitting were in London, would that not contravene the golden rule that hon. Members start off and finish in the same language?

Sir Peter Emery: If it was to be considered a golden rule, the hon. Gentleman would be correct, but we have made the position clear. I hope that hon. Members' speeches will not be cut in half and that they will not have to make half of it in Wales and half in England. To get over that golden rule, I urge the Welsh Grand Committee Chairman to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that the Procedure Committee might reconsider this matter, as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) from the Front Bench. It is common for people in the course of a conversation or a speech to switch from one language to another. It is a natural habit in west Wales, in the Gwynedd valley, where my wife comes from, and in many other regions. The Committee and the House should think about that point.

Sir Peter Emery: Although my mother was a Thomas, indeed to goodness, it was not necessary to switch from one language to the other. We should proceed along with this. After all, it is the start of an experiment. If it appears that there is a problem, the matter can be reviewed. That seems to be the sensible way to proceed. This is a new initiative and difficulties will need to be ironed out. Let us get the system working first and then we can—

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I want to register my support for the principle that it is better to use one language in one speech. I am not sure whether that needs to be laid down in the stipulation, but it is good practice to follow; otherwise, we tend to get tokenism—this is a common phenomenon in Wales—when people start their speeches in Welsh, deliver the meat in English and then return to Welsh. That is thoroughly bad practice. I want hon. Members to use Welsh seriously and thoroughly throughout their contributions to our debates.

Sir Peter Emery: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He will not expect me to become a judge of the variation of views among Welsh Members on that matter.

There was some criticism of cost, because the procedure will involve additional expenditure that has not been thought about or budgeted for. However, when we examined the probable cost, we found it to be quite

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small—about £2,500 per sitting in Wales. That is small compared with the cost for the Scottish Grand Committee, which has to travel to Scotland.

Points were made about the Order Paper and the *Official Report*. In paragraph 10 of our report, I asked the House to note that those documents were produced by and for the House and therefore should be comprehensible to all Members of the House. There is nothing to stop any hon. Member producing his speech in the Welsh language if that is what he wishes, but the Committee did not think that it made sense to have a Welsh language *Official Report* or Order Paper, as they would not be understood by the vast majority of hon. Members.

We have attempted—I hope—to be practical in our recommendations to the House, which the Government have been willing to accept. I hope that they meet the wishes of the House and of all Welsh Members, who obviously have a particular interest in safeguarding a language that is theirs and that there is great reason to safeguard.

As I have said from the beginning, this procedure must not be considered as a toe or a foot in the door for any other language, at any time, to be accepted in the House—only English can be the language for parliamentary use.

8.2 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I, too, wish to thank the Procedure Committee for the speed with which it tackled its remit from the Leader of the House. I will not follow the arguments of the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) on whether the English language should be known as the British language, for the central reason that this country is made up of four nations, so there is no such thing as a British language.

I very much welcome the proposal that Welsh should be capable of being used in parliamentary proceedings in Wales. The word "permitted" in the motion—in the context of the oldest living language in these islands, which has a special statutory status—strikes an odd note, although it is technically correct.

As Members, we should not pat ourselves on the back too much over the proposal to allow each Select Committee meeting in Wales to presume in favour of the use of Welsh for those witnesses who wish to use the language.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), in his evidence, made this valid point:

> "Part of the reason for taking evidence away from Westminster is to hear people in their working environment or in a setting that is directly relevant to the inquiry".

Therefore, I was a little surprised to read that the only time the Welsh Affairs Select Committee had taken evidence in Welsh was as far back as 1981, although it has taken formal evidence in Wales on 18 occasions since then.

My hon. Friend made the point that some other Committees sitting in Wales, such as the Agriculture Committee, might wish to take evidence in Welsh. I believe that it could. Paragraph 13(d) of the Procedure Committee's report says that Select Committees should give notice of any intention to allow evidence to be heard in Welsh. That is quite wrong. It should be automatically presumed that the Committees will take evidence in Welsh, unless there is good reason to the contrary—for example, a lack of translation facilities. I do not understand why a decision should have to be made on each and every occasion.

I said earlier that we should not pat ourselves on the back too much. For a long time, other bodies set up by the House have done what my hon. Friend the Member for Gower emphasised. It is recorded in the archives of the House that one of my ancestors gave evidence in Welsh to a royal commission on land in Wales and Monmouthshire as far back as 28 April 1894. David Jenkins was called and examined through an interpreter. He had no language other than Welsh in which to express himself if the royal commission wanted to hear how his father had been dispossessed by the Earl of Lisburne from a farm in 1875, which had been tenanted by the family for four or five generations from as far back as 1797 or even earlier. If the royal commission wanted to hear about the hardship involved, it could hear it only in Welsh. It was happening then in the real world, so there is no reason why it should not happen now. I expect that David Jenkins was one of many people who could not express himself in any language other than Welsh.

We have moved on during the past 50 years and we have passed three important Acts, each in turn enhancing the status of our language. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the shadow Leader of the House, said succinctly in her evidence, it was inconceivable that, having obliged other bodies in Wales to provide a Welsh facility, we should not do the same. That is the crux of the argument.

There was no such thing as the Welsh Grand Committee until it was conceived by the joint efforts of Ness Edwards—who was the Member of Parliament for Caerphilly and the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding)—and Goronwy Roberts, the Member of Parliament for Caernarfon. It is right that, while English should remain the language of this House, the Welsh Grand Committee, when sitting in Wales, should be able to hear contributions in Welsh from hon. Members. If confined to that Committee, I see no great difficulty in having speeches in Welsh wherever the Committee sits, but that is my personal view. In practice, we are advocates and we seek to persuade, so I suspect that there will not be many instances of Members wishing to do that. Nevertheless, the principle of being able to do so should be established.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), the Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee, said in his evidence that, from his experience of the Council of Europe, he did not envisage much of a problem with the proposal. I have just returned from the European Court of Human Rights and the diversity of 14 judges from countries as different as Estonia and Turkey, advocates, members of the public, and so on—yet in the cases that I heard there was no difficulty with simultaneous translation. We have moved on and the facilities exist.

One important practical point is that the translators, especially the simultaneous translators, should be competent. Translating is a difficult art. Most of us who are privileged to be bilingual would not set up as simultaneous translators. It is a difficult art that requires special training. Those I know in that art—they are

international translators—either have a very mixed background or have immersed themselves in more than one culture. I believe that we in Wales have the advantage in our translators because we are brought up in a bilingual society.

No one should think that translating is an easy art to do well. Hence, one sees at international gatherings that translators usually do not operate for more than 20 minutes or half an hour at a time, when someone else has to take over, particularly if the subject is technical. I emphasise the importance of good translators.

Hon. Members have already mentioned the practical problems involved if a person switches during his speech from one language to another. Those problems are not insuperable. We are on a learning curve and, as the right hon. Member for Honiton rightly said, we should reconsider the situation as we go along according to how it develops. That was an important point, which I endorse fully. Let us make a start and see how it goes.

It is curious that one of the things that might happen—I disagree entirely with the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on this issue—is that one might want to make a point or more than one point in one language and then switch to English for the remainder of the speech. That would not be tokenism and should not be disapproved of, if we can get over the learning curve; otherwise, the curious effect will be that someone who wants to make a point in Welsh will want to develop his entire speech in Welsh, whereas he might have been prepared to make most of the speech as an advocate, to seek to persuade and to ensure that the language is directly addressed to the majority of those who know both languages. That is an important issue, but it is not insuperable.

Many years ago, I attended the Canadian Parliament, in Ottawa. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Honiton was with me on that occasion—it was a long time ago, but he may well have been. I think that it was a meeting of the North Atlantic Assembly. Pierre Trudeau was there, fielding questions as Prime Minister in two languages. If a question was put to him in French, he would reply in French. If it was asked in English, he would reply in English. Certainly I saw no difficulties. I am not competent to comment on his French, but he was a native-born French speaker.

I am proud that when—on my first occasion as Secretary of State for Wales—I visited Gwynedd county council, in Easter 1974, the same type of system prevailed. I was questioned and addressed in both languages. Many questions went on for the good part of two hours, and I sought as best as I could to answer in whatever language the question was asked in. Certainly, as regards the language, there was no complaint—although there might have been complaints about the contents of the answers. It is not an insuperable difficulty, and I think that the wise words of the right hon. Member for Honiton—that we should consider the position as we go along—should be borne in mind.

I welcome these proposals. On the whole, they are very sensible. I endorse the thanks given to the Select Committee on Procedure for its speed. We are grateful to it for its recommendations. We have come a long way since the time when another ancestor of mine, my grandfather, had to wear the Welsh knot. We have moved a great deal since then. I am grateful to the Committee.

8.13 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I, too, warmly welcome the third report of the Select Committee on Procedure on the use of the Welsh language in parliamentary proceedings in Wales. I compliment all those who contributed to the Committee's deliberations and led it to its eminently sensible and very comprehensive set of conclusions. I should particularly like to thank my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons for his leadership and my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) for, I am sure, the wise guidance that he gave to the Committee. It certainly deserves a "diolch yn fawr iawn" from us, which means thank you very much. The origins of the Welsh language lie way back in Romano-Celtic times, or possibly earlier. I do not have to remind the House that the earliest poetry we have, the "Gododdin", was written at least a couple of centuries before "Beowulf". Although most English hon. Members would not understand a word of "Beowulf", we have a reasonable chance of familiarising ourselves with the contents of the "Gododdin".

The Welsh language has, of course, long enjoyed the protection of the House. In the 16th century, Parliament legislated that the Bible should be translated into Welsh. Those of us who cherish the language know how important that decision was in ensuring its survival. In this century, Parliament has, of course, passed a number of Acts that have promoted the use of the language, culminating in the 1993 Act, the full effects of which have yet to be realised.

I accept without question that the language of the proceedings of Parliament is English, but, now that the Welsh Grand Committee is occasionally to become peripatetic in Wales, it would not be understandable, appropriate or right if that Committee—for example, when meeting in a predominantly Welsh-speaking town such as Caernarfon—were not able to allow speeches, questions or interventions in Welsh. That goes for anywhere else in Wales.

During the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, there was mention of the translation that will appear in *Hansard*. Perhaps it is just as well to remind ourselves that there is no reason why a Welsh speaker in the Welsh Grand Committee should not supply the Official Reporters with his version of his speech, just as we now supply *Hansard* with copies of any copious notes that we may have.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton mentioned the visit of President Chirac. I certainly received many letters about his address in French to both Houses of Parliament. The letters asked why French was permitted at the Palace of Westminster while Welsh was not. I explained that the President's address was not a part of the proceedings of Parliament but rather a "special ceremonial occasion", as my right hon. Friend described it. Furthermore—as yet—President Chirac is not an honourable Member of this Parliament.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee laid down its ground rules in 1980, under what I thought must have been the very wise chairmanship of the former Member for Pontypool, Mr. Leo Abse. Those rules dealt with the Select Committee's meetings in Wales and with possible requests for the use of the Welsh language. That Committee's far-sighted proceedings are reproduced in an

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annexe to this report, and I am glad that the Procedure Committee found those proceedings a useful precedent, which it has now refined.

I cannot find much fault with the Procedure Committee's recommendations, although when we come to practise them we may find some shortcomings that we cannot anticipate. I am sure that those shortcomings can be overcome with a modicum of common sense and good humour. We have already heard the argument whether a speech should be in Welsh in its entirety or whether it could be partly in Welsh and partly in English. Clearly, there are arguments to be made for both points of view.

Personally, I am inclined to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton that we should begin by asking that speeches should be entirely in Welsh. Welsh speakers in the Chamber know that we wish to encourage the speaking of Welsh, but there is a danger in the tokenism to which the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North referred. However, I am sure that there are also advantages in the part Welsh, part English speech, if only because it allows double exposure in the media.

I regard the use of Welsh by parliamentary Committees in Wales as an important and necessary step, not only in demonstrating official recognition of the language but in establishing the willingness of Parliament to get as close to the electors as it reasonably can.

8.20 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) knows as well as any hon. Member the problems that are experienced by people who want to use the Welsh language at an official level in Wales. Of course, he steered the Welsh Language Act 1993 through the House. He also referred to "Y Gododdin"—I am sure that those taking the official note of our proceedings breathed a sigh of relief that he was not tempted to quote it. However, I am sure that when he speaks in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales, he will take the opportunity to do so.

Like other hon. Members, I have read the record of the House's dealings with languages other than English. I read the record of the proceedings of 21 July 1966, almost 30 years ago to the month. At that time, the first Plaid Cymru Member—Mr. Gwynfor Evans who represented Carmarthen—entered the House. He raised a point of order with the then Speaker about the possibility of taking the oath in Welsh. The Speaker ruled firmly that the oath had to be taken in English, although a number of hon. Members of all parties supported Mr. Evans.

I am surprised that no other hon. Member has referred to that occasion today because in 1974 the Speaker allowed hon. Members to take the oath in either Welsh or English. Indeed, the oath can today be taken in Gaelic, too. There are, therefore, precedents for people applying to speak in Welsh in the House. Although the House did not feel able to accept the request in 1966, it subsequently felt that it was appropriate to do so.

My point is that although, historically, the House has not been able to accept such requests, it has eventually reconsidered the position. Although it took 400 years for the oath to be taken in Welsh, it was at least a step in the right direction. Mr. Gwynfor Evans made his point in 1966, and by 1974 the oath could be taken in Welsh.

We ought to be examining the demand in the House for the use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee. In the previous Parliament—in 1988—an all-party early-day motion was tabled and eventually signed by a good many hon. Members representing all the countries of Britain. A grand total of 28 hon. Members felt that it was right and proper for Welsh to be used in the Welsh Grand Committee.

In 1988, it had not been suggested that the Welsh Grand Committee should become a peripatetic body. It was, however, suggested that Welsh should be used in proceedings in the House—in other words, where we usually meet, in Committee Room 10. There has been considerable debate about the restructuring of the Welsh Grand Committee and everyone eventually agreed that it should be meeting in Wales. Although we think that it is a body almost beyond reform, given that it is to continue to meet, it has been agreed that it should be meeting in Wales periodically. The demand for the right to speak Welsh in that body thus became overwhelming, as the right hon. Member for Conwy said.

Having passed the Welsh Language Act 1993 so that the Welsh and English languages should be treated equally, and now that the Welsh Grand Committee is to meet in Wales, it would be ludicrous if an hon. Member could not speak in Welsh. It was not a party political issue, and when the Welsh parliamentary party met the Secretary of State for Wales, there was a broad consensus that it was right and proper to allow hon. Members to speak Welsh when the Welsh Grand Committee meets in Wales.

It seems that all the obstacles that the House thought could be placed in the way of using a language other than English have been overcome in relation to proceedings in Wales. As has been said, week after week in council and other chambers in Wales, people are allowed to use Welsh and English—they can use either language and the content of their speeches is translated simultaneously. That is an enormous advantage. No one present at such meetings is at a disadvantage because both languages can be followed equally or people can follow one language in translation. There is no problem with that.

The Select Committee on Procedure is to be congratulated on recognising that the language problems could be overcome in relation to the Welsh Grand Committee meeting in Wales. However, I found one aspect of the Committee's recommendations a little curious. The Committee adopted the proposition of the Clerk of the House, as the Leader of the House mentioned. The report states:

"any proceedings of the House must be comprehensible to all Members, and must therefore be in the only language all Members are assumed to understand."

I can fully appreciate the first part of that sentence—we all agree that any proceedings must be comprehensible to all Members—but it goes on to say that any proceedings

"must therefore be in the only language all Members are assumed to understand",

which means that all speeches have to be in English.

Simultaneous translation facilities mean that any speech can be heard in a language that everyone can understand. If a Member is speaking in Welsh but his speech is

simultaneously translated into English, an hon. Member who cannot speak Welsh can still fully comprehend what the other is saying. I am not sure that the Committee's comment still holds true as a general rule.

If the rule can now be extended to the use of Welsh for the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales, there is no obvious problem in extending it to the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in the Palace of Westminster. The practical problem has been overcome in relation to proceedings in Wales and can be overcome in Westminster.

In case hon. Members think that my idea is revolutionary, I am not suggesting that proceedings in the Chamber or in any Standing or Select Committee of the House should be in Welsh. What I am suggesting is that hon. Members should be allowed to address the Welsh Grand Committee in Welsh, whether it is meeting in Wales or Westminster. Clearly, that would mean Committee Room 10 would have to be fitted with translation equipment, but I cannot see any practical problem with that.

While we recognise that the Select Committee on Procedure's recommendations are a practical and acceptable step forward, the Committee, once it has considered how things develop in Wales, might want to examine the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster.

I should like to put one point of detail to the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) about the production of a Welsh language *Official Report*, which was also mentioned by the Leader of the House and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). I understand that there will not be a Welsh *Official Report*, but if an hon. Member who has spoken in Welsh finds another way in which to make his speech available in Welsh, he will be allowed to do so.

This also seems rather curious. Why do we publish reports of our proceedings? It is so that people outside can read and follow them; it is not for our purposes. It is curious that a person speaking in Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales has to have his speech translated so that people can read it in a language in which it was not delivered. We must remember that people who will follow our proceedings in Wales will be members of the media—spoken and written. If they want to follow our proceedings in the language in which they were delivered and the *Official Report* needs to be in English, why could not a Welsh-delivered version be annexed to it? If people want to refer to the speech in its language of origin, what is the problem with making it an annex to the *Official Report*, even if the *Official Report* is in English? Perhaps that can be considered again after the Committee has met in Wales a few times.

Progress on the use of Welsh in parliamentary proceedings in this place has been painfully slow. As I have said, it took more than 400 years for hon. Members to be able to take the oath in Welsh and, recently, to be able to speak in Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales. Those are very small steps. If we had our own Parliament in Wales none such problems would occur because there would be a bilingual system. But, Westminster is currently our only Parliament and I see no reason why the Welsh language—a 2,000-year-old living language—should not be allowed its rightful and proper place in proceedings relating to Wales, whether in Westminster or Wales.

8.31 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly against some of the Procedure Committee's recommendations. I should like to alter slightly the Latin quotation cited by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House by saying omnes cives Britannici sumus, which loosely translates as, "We are all Brits here." Whether hon. Members are English, Welsh, Irish or Scottish, we are all British—or Irish—citizens and we all speak English in the House and its Committees.

Such use of English may originally have been part of a campaign to discriminate against Welsh, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) suggested, but no reasonable hon. Member could doubt that the rule serves the convenience of monoglot Members, who should not be discriminated against. Most hon. Members can speak English fluently—*[Interruption.]* Even in Wales, 80 per cent. of the population cannot speak Welsh.

I warmly welcome the first recommendation of the Procedure Committee that English is and should remain the language of the House. I would have been happier if the Committee had left it at that, subject to one exception to which I shall return. I do not accept the recommendation that members of the Welsh Grand Committee should be entitled to address the Committee in Welsh when it meets in Wales. I consider that a totally unnecessary, inappropriate and unacceptable sop to Welsh nationalism.

Such an entitlement is unnecessary, because every member who serves on the Welsh Grand Committee is almost bound to be capable of speaking and understanding English. It is inappropriate, because most Committee members are likely to be unable to understand Welsh. It is unacceptable, because the possibility of Committee members speaking Welsh represents a breach of the centuries-old principle that the language of Parliament should be English.

The Procedure Committee has considered the matter against the background of the Welsh Language Act 1993. This is not the time to rehearse the general arguments about how best to preserve and enhance the richness that the Welsh language bestows on the culture of Wales, but the detailed application of Government policy on the Welsh language can be intensely irritating and wasteful of paper.

Every publication that I receive from a Welsh Government agency is printed in both languages, even though virtually every recipient has a good understanding of English. As a non-Welsh speaker, I rip such publications in half and discard the Welsh part—not because I have anything against the Welsh language, but to save storage space and make a small gesture against the waste of paper and print. Some documents frustrate my intentions because the two languages are printed on opposite sides of the page. Whenever practicable, recipients of bilingual documents should elect which language they prefer and then be given a single-language document.

Documents produced in Welsh cost many times more than those produced in English, because Welsh documents have so few readers. The policy of wasting paper and

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money will be built on if the House accepts the Procedure Committee's recommendation to introduce interpreters and additional electronic equipment that, according to the Committee's report, will cost about £2,500 a sitting. What a waste of money!

I would have more sympathy with the Procedure Committee's proposals if I thought that there was any significant risk of a member of the Welsh Grand Committee who speaks Welsh being unable to speak English. From talking in English to hon. Members who speak Welsh, such as the hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) and for Gower (Mr. Wardell), I have formed the impression that their English is up to the higher standards found in the House. Such hon. Members are the Welsh equivalent of English people who are good at Latin, Greek, French or German, who tend also to be first-class English speakers. There is no practical benefit for hon. Members who speak Welsh being allowed to speak Welsh.

Mr. Llwyd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sweeney: I regret that time does not permit me to do so.

I accept that those whose first language is Welsh may be even more at home with Welsh than they are with English, but any special Welsh idioms or nuances of meaning are likely to be lost in translation. So, for monoglot English colleagues, and in *Hansard* later, the added value of the original Welsh would be lost.

I said at the outset that, although I favour the retention of English as the only language authorised and spoken in the House and its Committees, I also favour one exception. If the Welsh Grand Committee or the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs ever take evidence from Welsh speakers who are not hon. Members, and if such witnesses are not competent in speaking English, they should be allowed, at the discretion of the Chairman, to address the Committee in Welsh—whether they give evidence in Wales or Westminster.

I make that exception not to give witnesses who are equally at home in English or Welsh the opportunity to elect to speak Welsh, but to ensure that Committees are not deprived of the opportunity of hearing evidence from a Welsh speaker in the very unusual circumstances of such a person being unable to speak English.

8.37 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It is refreshing that we have heard the authentic, arrogant voice of linguistic chauvinism towards the end of the debate. I shall not dwell on it. Perhaps Freud could explain why the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) tears in half bilingual forms. There are probably deep-seated reasons for it.

The House has taken a more enlightened position. I add my gratitude to that of others for the thoroughness and speed with which the Procedure Committee reported. I should like to strike a slightly cynical note in saying, to vulgarise Virgil, "Timeo Conservatores et dona ferentes"—I fear the Conservatives though they bear gifts.

Progress since I tabled an amendment on 11 March—it has caused the Government to act so quickly—has been remarkably speedy. They have suddenly realised that the Welsh language is a great treasure. As has been said, the first early-day motion that I tabled on the first St. David's day after I was elected called for the use of the Welsh language to be permitted in the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee using simultaneous translation facilities. That early-day motion was tabled not on 11 March this year but on 1 March 1988.

We should all acknowledge that the reason for the extraordinary speed with which the Government have acted has little to do with their love of the Welsh language and much to do with their desire for the Welsh Grand Committee to sit in Wales and to do a certain amount of mischief as they see it in putting their case before the people of Wales. They will be sadly disappointed in that aim, which has a clear political slant.

Let me say what a pleasure it has been listening to the speeches tonight. In my constituency, a fortnight ago I attended a centre where the Romans were in Wales—the second legion were in Caerleon 2,000 years ago. A group of schoolchildren were visiting the Capricorn centre, which is a wonderful centre for teaching children about life in Roman times. That school party was from ysgol Trimsaran. The children were learning about the Roman barracks and the living conditions there. It was all fascinating stuff.

However, the most vivid reminiscence of Rome was on the tongues of the children who were all Welsh-speaking from Trimsaran. When they see the bridge that crosses the river at Caerleon, they do not call it a bridge, they call it a "pont". When they see the windows that decorate the town, they do not say "window", but "ffenest". Those are two examples of a whole range of words that came to Wales with the Romans 2,000 years ago when the children of Caerleon were bilingual. It is a remarkable miracle that those words have echoed down the centuries and are a great living treasure.

The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) mentioned the Gododdin. He did not quote from it. I shall attempt to do so from memory. Its first words are of great significance:

"Gwyr a aeth Gatraeth
Godigog oedd eu ffriedd".

That means "The men went to Catterick". It was the first book in the Welsh language and was written two centuries before Beowulf. If I quoted Beowulf, not a soul in this place would understand me.

The Leader of the House talked about Chaucerian English which is one of our great joys and a treasure to us all. It is a beautiful language:

"Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breth
Inspired hath in every holt and heth
The Tender croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye".

It is music; it is poetry; it is beautiful and it is part of the inheritance of every hon. Member. Why do we not delight in it? When I used a different quotation—

Mr. Newton: I suppose that the hon. Gentleman realises that he will have to write that out for *Hansard*.

Mr. Flynn: I shall be quite happy to do that, although I am afraid that the spelling is a matter of dispute. I would be happy to write it out for hon. Members as well.

If only hon. Members who are unfortunately monoglot could understand what it means to speak more than one language. They are not better Welshmen or Englishman than anyone else. We have many reasons for welcoming the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), to his place tonight. He said with some passion, "I do not speak the two languages of Wales," but he is no lesser Welshman for that. If only hon. Members knew what they were missing—the great treasure that has been handed down to the children from Trimsaran.

Earlier today I was listening to a gentleman from the place where I was educated. Mr. John Humphreys is from Splott. I had the great fortune to be born in Grangetown in Cardiff and educated in Splott. It is known as the dream ticket in Cardiff circles. Unfortunately, neither of those areas was rich in the Welsh language. Mr. John Humphreys referred to the great change that has taken place since 1979 when the Welsh language, the Irish language and many other languages were seen as a divisive grit in politics. They did divide, separate and create suspicions and hatred. That is gone now. It is remarkable that in Grangetown, Splott, Lliswerry and Ringland in Newport there is a great flowering of Welsh schools. Children without any Welsh language in their background are becoming first generation Welsh speakers—for which they will be grateful for the rest of their days. That is a wonderful improvement that has taken place in our time.

I share many of the misgivings that have been expressed about the decision of the Procedure Committee. There are many points to quibble about, particularly by those who are used to living in two languages. Nobody is completely bilingual. Nobody is equally comfortable in both languages. Some are more comfortable in English and some are more comfortable in Welsh. It depends on their mother tongue. People should be allowed to use both languages.

I see little difference between what has been suggested for Wales and what happens in the House of Commons. People who come here from Estonia and Lithuania sit in a special corner where equipment is available to enable our proceedings to be translated for them. That equipment is most sophisticated and could be adapted to other languages.

We are all in the mood to welcome the concession that we have here tonight. We claim it as a right and we look forward to the great joy of using in the only Parliament that Wales has both the beautiful languages of Wales.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, Mr. Rhodri Morgan.

8.45 pm

Mr. Morgan: Gyda chymiatad y Ty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was totally unnecessary.

Mr. Morgan: I was about to ask for what you had already allowed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It took me unawares and I apologise.

The only false note in the debate was struck by the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) who failed to join in the spirit of the proceedings. In Wales as a whole—perhaps omitting the particular corner with which the hon. Gentleman is most familiar—the use of Welsh is appropriate when the Welsh Grand Committee sits in Wales and for those for whom it is more appropriate to speak Welsh.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman attended the meeting in Committee Room 14 a couple of months ago when 300 Welsh farmers spoke to the House about BSE. Although they all spoke English, one could tell by the way in which they spoke it that 95 per cent. of them would have been happier to address the informal procedings in Welsh. There was no question but that at least 280 of them would have been happier had the proceedings been mostly in Welsh. That was their better language. It was clear that they were used to discussing agricultural issues in Welsh. That would probably be the case in respect of other issues such as education.

It is not a matter of trying to compel those without a command of Welsh to speak it, but of giving permission to those who have a command of the language not to be debarred from speaking Welsh at appropriate times. The hon. Member for the Vale of Glamorgan failed to understand that.

The Britishness of our British Parliament is based on mutual respect between the four different nations that make up the United Kingdom. That in turn is based on the fact that English is our lingua franca. The issue does not arise for the 82 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom who live in England. However, that 82 per cent. should have the of respect for other 18 per cent. of the population who live in Scotland, Wales and Ireland and who have sometimes have a linguistic skill, preference or culture.

Today, when the second Severn crossing was opened, we are more closely integrated with England than Scotland or Ireland—north or south—in all aspects of economics except one. Only in respect of our language are we less integrated with England than even the Irish Republic, let alone Scotland or Northern Ireland, simply because we have never suffered the potato famine or the highland clearances. As a result, the Welsh language is seven or eight times as strong as the original languages are in Scotland or Ireland.

The necessity of preserving the Welsh language gives Wales a great deal of distinctiveness; that is why we ask the British Parliament to respect that distinctiveness and particularly welcome the recommendations of the Procedure Committee. I hope that we shall carry with us some of those who are more reluctant, such as the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan.

8.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): We have had a constructive and positive debate, ably introduced by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. He reminded us that certain of our leading colleagues could not be with us tonight for good reason, but far be it from me to suggest that it was as a result of any such absences that we had such a constructive and positive debate. I heard nothing divisive in any of the differences that were aired, and nothing that might prevent further progress.

A former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), spoke of the experiences of one of his ancestors in this House with

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

the Earl of Lisburne. Only a few weeks ago, I was with the present Earl as we launched a new Welsh milk for St. David's day. In that direction, things have moved on.

I was glad to hear the speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts). For the attention that he has lavished upon the language of Wales over the years and for seeking to take forward its interests in legislation, my right hon. Friend can be regarded as the father of the Welsh language. We heard a brief intervention from the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who I seem to remember is the only remaining Member who was a Minister the previous time there was no Welsh-speaking Minister at the Welsh Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) observed that the Conservative party is second only to Plaid Cymru in bilingual terms, with one third of Conservative Members of Parliament in Wales able to speak the Welsh language. That puts the Conservatives above the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. My only quarrel in the debate was with the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) who objected to tokenism and insisted that only one language be used here. I would say to him, were he still here, that those of us whose Welsh is inadequate or absent deserve encouragement and should not be frustrated from taking the opportunity to try to use the Welsh language.

Much of the debate this evening has centred on what the Procedure Committee has cautiously suggested. The caution of the Committee was set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Committee. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Committee for considering the matter. He referred to the practical problems and the need to have more experience of dealing with them. Various Members have referred to the problems, which were introduced by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan).

The suggestion was made that the recommendation of the Committee that Members restrict themselves to one language during any one speech might be unduly restrictive. Of course a Member might wish to deal with several distinct issues during a single speech, and it might seem appropriate to deal with some in English and some in Welsh. I agree with the Committee's suggestion that we ought to proceed with caution, as we do not want to cause difficulties for *Hansard* and make it more difficult for it to make the accurate report of the Committee's proceedings that the House is entitled to expect.

When we have gained some experience of running the Welsh Grand Committee in both languages, we may find that the Chairman, the Committee and the reporters can cope with a situation in which a Member switches from one language to another once or perhaps twice in a speech, provided—ideally—that everyone knows his intention. When we reach that point, we may leave it to the discretion of the Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee to permit a slight relaxation of the rules set out in the Procedure Committee's report.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) asked about the record of proceedings of speeches in Welsh. I could be negative and suggest that he has not proved it necessary to have an alternative record and that, inevitably, it would result in extra expense. Those are not insubstantial objections to his proposals, but I prefer to follow the Procedure Committee and say that we should try to leave the matter open. When this House has had more experience of the Welsh Grand Committee using the language, we might find it appropriate to look again at the matter.

In conclusion, I wish to make the same point as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West—this is a great day for Wales. We are making great steps in our cultural and material fields, and this evening the House has been dealing with our language. Also, just before 11 o'clock this morning, the second Severn crossing was opened. I had the opportunity to be present, along with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Transport, when the bridge was opened by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. It is a major development that will improve the economic affairs of south Wales, and it links to the very matter we are considering this evening.

Also present—perhaps he is still there—was the Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), in whose constituency one side of the bridge is located. I am glad that we can move forward—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the question, pursuant to Order [17 May].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That, whilst English is and should remain the language of this House, the use of Welsh be permitted in parliamentary proceedings held in Wales, subject to the conditions set out in the Third Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 387).

Diabetes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

8.54 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise the subject of diabetes. I did not expect to make my speech so early, but I promise the Minister of State that I will not keep him from an early bath.

I start by declaring an interest—I am an insulin-dependent diabetic, and naturally I take a particular interest in the matter. I shall be talking about matters that lie outside the Minister's area of responsibility, as diabetes is an issue that spreads into other areas. I do not expect definite answers from him on any of these matters, but I hope that he will communicate my queries to other Ministers in one way or another.

I sought this debate to coincide with National Diabetes Week, which in fact is next week, between 9 and 15 June. The week of activities seeks to educate the public generally and to heighten awareness of the problems and possibilities associated with the condition of diabetes. The British Diabetic Association is targeting in National Diabetes Week fitness and exercise as a crucial part of a diabetic's maintenance of good balance and good health.

When diabetics maintain the delicate balance between diet, drugs and exercise, they save themselves a lot of personal discomfort and misery in the short and long term, but also save the NHS vast amounts of expenditure. It is therefore in the interests of individuals and the Exchequer that, as a community, we get diabetic care right.

To indicate the scale of the problem, which has not yet been quantified by the Government, it should be recorded that there are about 1.4 million known diabetics in Britain, with a similarly huge number not diagnosed. Some 20,000 diabetics—almost all of whom are insulin-dependent—are under the age of 20. That is about 100 for each health district. These people have an entire lifetime to seek to control the condition.

There is a much greater prevalence of diabetes in our Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities, and a higher incidence in men than in women. I do not think it is irrelevant to say that, worldwide, there are estimated to be 110 million people with diabetes, and in Europe, 18.5 million people. A significant fact that interests me is that 10 per cent. of insulin-dependent diabetics use 80 per cent. of the world's supplies of insulin. Western intervention in eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union was particularly important given the lack of health care for diabetics. It is also an important matter in third-world countries, and may be one in which Lady Chalker might wish to take a great interest.

In large measure, diabetics have to care for themselves on a day-by-day basis. It is a complex task requiring help, education and constant self-monitoring, particularly of blood sugar levels. The more even those levels can be kept, the less likelihood there is of long-term severe complications such as retinopathy, neuropathy, cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, amputations and other conditions that can follow from long-term diabetes.

When thousands of new diabetics are diagnosed in this country each year, the size of that education and training task can be readily appreciated. As I understand it, records of diabetes are not kept by health authorities, so we have no precise statistics. I understand that considerable pressure has been exerted for local registers of diabetics. I commend that proposal to the Minister if he has not already thought about it, but I am sure he has.

I have many complaints and many descriptions of shortcomings to make in the debate, but I would not like it to be thought of as a gloomy debate. Professor Harry Keen, president of the BDA, has quite rightly said:

"These are times of great promise for people with diabetes."

There are exciting developments in research into implants of insulin-producing islets, artificial pancreases, as well better as insulin and better delivery systems for insulin. The Government could do an enormous amount for the health of the nation by encouraging and financing an intensification or speeding up of research into those developments.

Cuts or the freezing of research budgets, such as that of the Medical Research Council, whose budget has been cut by 1.5 per cent. in the current year, are very sad, and perhaps foolish. They hinder the likelihood of huge savings that would come from more efficient remedies or controls of diabetes. The same is true of research into the causes of diabetes.

There have also been admirable advances in recent years in the creation of a network of diabetic clinics. At my local clinic at Ormskirk hospital, consultants, a specialist diabetic nurse, a dietician and a chiropodist work together with back-up staff. The easily available provision of such specialist facilities to the entire diabetic population is an aim, I believe, of the NHS, and it should be achieved as soon as humanly possible.

The St. Vincent declaration has set out targets to reduce dramatically over five years the incidence of severe complications in diabetics. It also sets out to change the emphasis, in order to deal with individuals who are diabetics instead of a category or a type of person.

I urge the Government to study the shortcomings and difficulties that are faced by diabetics, and to alleviate them where they can. As I said before, I realise that many of them are not the responsibility of the Minister, but I know that he will be interested in them, and will communicate them to his colleagues in other Departments of State.

The Minister could deal directly with the first problem—the non-availability on prescription of Novopen needles. The Minister will recognise that the pen system for insulin delivery enables a diabetic to keep much better control over blood sugar levels, particularly those who have irregular life styles, as I do perforce as a Member of Parliament. The long-term savings for the NHS are enormous. While some people use replaceable needles several times, many cannot face, and perhaps should not be expected to face, reusing a steadily blunting needle. That can be exceedingly painful, and is a particular problem for young children. A week's supply of such needles can cost as much as £10. As they are not on prescription, that cost must be met by the insulin-dependent diabetic, who might be on the lowest of incomes. I believe that it is only a matter of time before that injustice, as I think it is, is remedied in response to the pressure from many thousands of pen users and would-be pen users.

The Government could make a very popular gesture by putting those pen needles on prescription, as disposable hypodermics are, at comparatively little cost and with

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

considerable future savings in terms of better control of diabetes. As diabetics are converted into using pen needles, they cease to use most of their disposable hypodermic syringes, which are on prescription, so the costs should more or less balance in the long run. I understand that discussions have been taking place on this matter inside the Department, and I urge the Minister to expedite them if he possibly can.

Experience has shown that no job exists that cannot be done as well by someone who is diabetic as by anyone else, whether it is the job of an international footballer or of an actor, such as Leo McKern, Sir Harry Secombe or Willie Rushton, who were all involved in exceedingly stressful jobs and are all insulin-dependent diabetics; or the jobs done by several hon. Members of the House, and of another place; or heavy manual work. Every diabetic person is different; that is the central message, if any, of this speech.

Each person must work out his or her own regime. Each person must anticipate times when blood sugar might become low because of missing out on a meal at a specific time or because of unexpected exercise. That can lead to hypoglycaemia, and the diabetic must ensure that he takes in extra carbohydrate sugars to compensate.

All diabetics, as far as I know—at least unless they are completely mad—carry emergency rations with them to counter such possibilities. However, some occupations deem insulin dependency to be incompatible with the work involved, and in most of the cases I shall mention that assumption is a blanket one, ignoring the individual's success or otherwise in controlling the diabetes, and even ignoring medical evidence provided on that person's behalf.

For example, police forces usually automatically suspend or sack insulin-dependent officers. Many dedicated police officers have written to me in considerable distress, having lost promising careers simply because they suddenly developed insulin-dependent diabetes in middle age. As far as I know, the Home Office has not seriously studied that problem. I have tabled several questions about this, and received an answer more or less to the effect, "It is nothing to do with us," or, "The problem is in hand."

It is wrongly assumed that a police officer who is insulin-dependent is more likely than the next man or woman to suffer lapses of health while working. The same applies to firefighters, with the added impetus that a firefighter who is insulin-dependent cannot drive a fire tender or one of the heavy vehicles that the fire service uses, so he or she gets the sack or is demoted or pushed sideways into a desk job.

Even more peculiarly, in most cases a similar ban applies to offshore work. I take one absurd example. A 50-year-old man working as a ticket seller on the Shetland Isles ferry service became insulin-dependent. As soon as that happened and his employers found out, he was sacked, because he was unable to comply with the medical standards for offshore work. That worker was never more than 15 minutes from land, and had nothing to do with running the vessel. He simply collected the ticket money for the vehicles on the ferry.

Just as worrying is the story of a girl accepted for nurse training. After her initial acceptance, she was suddenly refused because she was insulin-dependent. Her health record, attested by her doctor, was excellent, but she told the hospital, in all honesty, that she had experienced hypos during the previous two years. The attacks were mild and had been self-treated. The hospital concerned was, in effect, refusing to accept any nurse with insulin dependency.

Only this morning I read an article in the *Lancashire Evening Post* about a diabetic man in Wigan, who said that he was refused entry into the armed forces because of his diabetes. He had also been sacked from his employment as a barber when his employer found out that he was insulin-dependent.

Perhaps most pressing in all these examples of discrimination—that is what they are—is the case of heavy goods vehicle and public service vehicle drivers. An insulin-dependent diabetic applying for a driving licence after 1 July this year will be banned from holding one of the new class 2 licences, which would prevent the driving of any vehicle over 3.5 tonnes.

Already, most HGV drivers in the United Kingdom who become insulin-dependent are effectively banned from continuing their employment. Some flexibility is possible in the European legislation, but it is by no means certain that the Government will take advantage of it to ensure that people treated with insulin are not automatically barred from driving class 2 vehicles and the range of associated jobs. I hope that the Minister will have a quiet word with his hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who is responsible for these matters and who I know is fully aware of the details.

There is a further problem associated with drivers. People who apply for work as taxi drivers in some parts of the country are refused licences because they are insulin users. I am unclear how much protection might be provided for those who suffer discrimination in employment in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I know that some protection is provided in insurance matters, but, as I understand it, there is no protection in occupational matters.

Two issues underlie all these complaints. Insulin-dependent people will have hypoglycaemic experiences from time to time, and there is no point disguising it. They can be very severe. The attacks result from an excessive drop in blood sugar levels and bring about a disorientation which is rather like drunkenness, only slightly less pleasant. I have been a diabetic for 13 or 14 years, and I have suffered two such attacks, both in the middle of the night.

That raises another problem. As a nation, we keep no records of people who are insulin-dependent and subject to hypoglycaemic attacks but who live alone and have no back-up from relatives. Most relatives of such people are well aware of what the insulin-dependent person has to go through, and are alert to the need to protect them. About three years ago, in a sad case in Grangemouth in Scotland, a woman who was an insulin-dependent diabetic died in a coma, and her small baby died of starvation; yet we have no systems to monitor lone diabetics.

Vague knowledge of the problem of hypos causes the knee-jerk rejection of insulin dependents by the sort of employers I have mentioned. Those who suffer from hypos are those with poorly controlled diabetes, and no one would suggest that someone who is continually poorly controlled should be allowed to drive an HGV.

That would be complete nonsense. Most insulin dependents, however, are well controlled, and that is more and more the case as education and monitoring improves and as more pens are in use.

My case is that every insulin-dependent diabetic who seeks to gain or retain employment should be judged on his or her medical record, witnessed if necessary by independent doctors, as happens in other areas. We seek to end the blanket rejection of diabetics, because that is a plain injustice, and is also appallingly inefficient in economic and employment terms. Many other medical conditions could cause the problems that employers imagine will arise from diabetes, but most of them do not give rise to blanket bans such as I have described.

I have already said that it is incumbent on diabetics and their medical advisers to educate themselves about the best possible control of their condition. They have primary responsibility. However, it is also incumbent on employers and Ministries that impose regulations to educate themselves about the realities of diabetes and individual differences. The Government must take a key role, whether by using the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to disseminate good practice or through other means.

Between them, the Department of Health and, especially, the Home Office could—by insisting on an individual approach to judging an insulin-dependent diabetic's fitness for employment—make a major impact on employment practices, without any extra spending. Most insulin-dependent diabetics, like other people, simply want to earn a living and to contribute to key professions and occupations.

Diabetes is a condition with which many of us have to live, and most of us manage to live normal lives. We can do any job and undertake any task that other people do, with the possible exception of sugar testing. Diabetes can, and does, strike at random. It hit me at the age of 38, probably as a result of a kidney infection, although nobody really knows why. More than 1 million of us face potential discrimination in employment, yet we have a wide variety of talents and energy to contribute. The fact that many of us are not allowed to do so, out of ignorance on the part of those who run some of our systems, is an outrage. National Diabetes Week next week will be just a small part of a campaign to dispel some of that ignorance. I hope that the Government will not only join the campaign, but lead it.

9.18 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) for observing delightful courtesies at the beginning of his speech and pointing out that some of his comments would be on subjects that are not my direct departmental responsibility. I shall deal with those comments first. Although, of course, I am more than happy to accede to his request that I draw those points to the attention of my fellow Ministers, I can answer to some extent his points about blind prejudice towards people who suffer from diabetes.

It is common ground that we are happy to do what we can to dispel prejudice, to ensure a proper understanding in the public mind—especially among those who are potential employers of diabetics—of the real difficulties, and to explain why, in many circumstances, no difficulties arise from employing people who have the problem well controlled—as the hon. Gentleman rightly said.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his timing in bringing this matter before the House, but I was rather curious about his interpretation of the declaration of Members' interests. Even in these days, I am not sure that it is necessary to declare that one is suffering from a medical condition before speaking about it in the House.

The hon. Gentleman certainly displayed his close and keen personal interests, which I know go well beyond being a sufferer. He is an active member of the all-party parliamentary group on the condition, and I know the role that he has played in the British Diabetic Association. That is why those who read the report of his speech will understand that it has great value.

I shall deal with a number of the detailed points before using the debate to set the problem in context and to explain why my Department and all its Ministers view the condition seriously. I shall also explain why I share the hon. Gentleman's optimism. We have an agenda which we can develop together, and I think that it will improve treatment not just in the long term but in the short term. I may be able to tell the House why that agenda has been pursued positively. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is being pursued in that spirit.

The hon. Member raised two specific issues, the first of which was about registers. I am sure that everybody who is associated with the problem will be aware that we have been highly successful in incorporating diabetes into the primary care chronic disease management programme. When I was preparing for the debate, I was delighted to note that that programme has gone some 90 per cent. of the way towards achieving its targets.

In a sense, the chronic disease management programme is the core of providing the database that is necessary, and the sort of register to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I agree with him that the development of local databases is an extremely good way to measure performance against a set of targets. There is much interest in the concept of registers in the management not just of diabetes but across the spectrum of chronic diseases, and my Department takes a keen interest in that.

It is not just the chronic disease management programme that is being taken forward in this respect. Some districts have made much progress and have done a great deal of work towards building a district-based population diabetes register in collaboration with local GPs. That has been made possible with the rolling out of the chronic disease management programme. I see the role of the Government and the Department as the pulling together of the thinking that has been developed in this area, and the pooling of the efforts that have been made on registers.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Department held a workshop on registers last summer. That was extremely useful, and I am pleased to tell him that the results will shortly be published. He was right to highlight that as an important area in which thinking is being developed. It will be taken further, and I am sure that he will participate in the debate that will follow publication of the results of that workshop.

Not surprisingly, the hon. Gentleman spoke about disposable and reusable insulin pens and about needles. Of course my Department is aware of the issue and of the views of users, who have been well and constructively represented by the BDA. It might be helpful if I set out where we stand.

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

The BDA submitted, as the Gentleman will know, a comprehensive document earlier this year, which is being considered by Ministers and officials in the Department. Although it was not my specific responsibility within the Department, I was interested to see the document in detail. It was a first-class effort in putting together a sound, economically based case as to why it might make sense to move in that direction.

The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that I cannot give any commitment about that tonight, but I can reassure him that the matter is being treated extremely seriously. Discussions are under way, and I hope that we can make some progress towards reaching a common position and an understanding of the facts and economics that underlie the case made by the BDA.

It is not surprising that this debate has a high profile, because it precedes a very important week. Diabetes has a high profile not just in my Department but in the country as a whole. I shall use the time available to set that in context.

It may surprise the House to learn that the treatment of diabetes consumes NHS assets in excess of £1 billion per annum—between 4 and 5 per cent. of total NHS expenditure—because it is so widespread. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the fact that the extent was not quantified. The best efforts that we can make show that diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetics account for 2 per cent. of the population. I know that other figures show that it is perhaps somewhat higher to one percentage point, but even 2 per cent. shows how important and fundamental it is.

In recognition of that importance, the Department currently supports two major research projects into the illness. The hon. Gentleman touched on the importance of research, and I should like to put on record what the Department is doing. The total cost of the Department's projects is just under £1 million, within the centrally commissioned research programme. In addition, in 1993-94—the latest year for which full figures are available—the Medical Research Council spent a little over £4 million on diabetes research, made up of two components: £1 million in the MRC's research establishments, and almost £3 million in grants to universities and medical schools around the country, which, of course, carry out research projects based on local patients.

As I have mentioned, diabetes is specifically targeted by the chronic disease management programme, and that has been a success. In addition, the importance accorded to diabetes is illustrated by other work that is under way.

In August 1994, the clinical standards advisory group, an independent group giving expert advice to Health Departments and the NHS on standards of clinical care and availability of services, produced a report on standards of care for people with diabetes. The Health Departments accepted the group's main recommendation: that they should encourage purchasers of health care to ensure that there are adequate local diabetes services with appropriate standards specified in contracts. That matter has been brought to the attention of those who are at the heart of shaping patient care—the health authorities that examine these matters and decide which services will be available to local people.

Equally important, in the following year, in 1995, the final report of the St. Vincent task force on diabetes was published. The task force was set up in 1992, jointly by the Department and the British Diabetic Association. Its terms of reference were to advise on which aspects of the St. Vincent declaration recommendations needed to be addressed in England, and also their relative priority, and to provide detailed advice on action needed to implement the priority areas that were agreed with the Department following the advice that had been given under the first term of reference.

The task force was seen as extremely important by all interested and involved parties, so I will set out in fuller terms what has happened since. Its work was intended to be based on the recommendations made in the St. Vincent declaration, which was promulgated following the famous meeting of the European region of the World Health Organisation and the European committee of the International Diabetes Federation. The declaration recommended action in key areas and set outcome targets, which are an important way of holding health authorities accountable for progress.

The task force report was circulated widely throughout the NHS last year, and it makes recommendations about good clinical and management practice in 11 key areas. That work not only helped to raise awareness of diabetes among clinicians and the general population, but forged solid working relationships between my officials and the BDA and other professional colleagues in the service. That relationship is still paying dividends.

The Department of Health is building on the task force work in two main ways. Officials are working up detailed costings for implementation of the report's recommendations, by a survey of current provision and by means of a computer model. Probably more important is that a sub-group of the clinical outcomes group, more commonly known as COG, has been set up to develop guidance for purchasers.

The terms of reference of COG, which is a multi-professional, non-statutory committee that advises the Department on how to improve outcomes of clinical care, are to advise on the strategy for medical, nursing and therapy audit; facilitate the development of clinical and service-wide audit; disseminate good practice through sharing guidance, material and experience in audit; advise the chief medical officer and the chief nursing officer on the most appropriate action to ensure the attainment of desired clinical outcomes and on the relevant areas of research; and identify areas where measurable and sustainable improvements in health can be achieved, including examples of bad practice—which it is as important to eliminate as to establish good practice.

To highlight the importance that the Department attaches to the messages that came out of the St. Vincent task force and the CSAG reports, it set up a diabetes sub-group under COG—the clinical outcomes diabetes sub-group—whose task is to develop purchaser guidance based on the report's recommendations. A key element underpinning all that work is that it should be based firmly on medical and scientific evidence of effectiveness where possible.

The hon. Gentleman rightly emphasised the importance of ensuring that research is translated into good practice. There is a continuing body of work based on research

currently being undertaken, which, once it is complete, should be available to affect what happens in the field—as the hon. Gentleman suggested should happen.

I can illustrate the significant relationship forged during the sub-group's work by its diverse membership. Professor David Shaw, who chaired the St. Vincent task force so admirably, and Professor Harry Keen, chairman of the BDA, both serve on the sub-group, which will reinforce the strong link between the new group and the work of the task force. Their important experience of the life of the task force will add immeasurably to the depth of understanding of the issues in the group.

The sub-group started its work last autumn, and meets at monthly intervals. I understand that it is making excellent progress, and that is an important initiative for the Department. We in government have supported the St. Vincent initiative since its inception. I am sure that the work programme that is in hand is a sensible way forward, so that we can continue to make progress and secure better treatment levels and packages of care for all people who suffer from this terrible problem.

Although the hon. Gentleman said that he would let me have an early bath, it is useful that we have been able to use the earlier conclusion of tonight's proceedings to explore a serious problem in slightly greater depth. I am grateful to him for having raised it. I am especially grateful because it gives us an opportunity to set out the work programme that is in hand. On the other matters, I repeat my reassurance. I will, of course, raise them with the Ministers responsible, and I confirm that I am happy to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 June 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 13 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Security Industry

1. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to implement the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee in its first report of Session 1994-95, HC17, regarding regulation of the private security industry. [30261]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The details of our proposed scheme for access to the criminal records of potential employees in the private security industry are well advanced and I hope to announce the details shortly.

Mr. Jones: Why has the Minister taken so long on this important matter to respond to the excellent report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs? Does he agree that, alongside many excellent companies, there are charlatans who give bad advice for a fee? Why can we not have quality personnel, vetting procedures and statutory regulations?

Mr. Maclean: This is an important matter and it is vital that we get it right. We must bear it in mind that, although the hon. Gentleman can put up a fairly honest plea for the controls that he wants, many Labour Members have consistently opposed the private security industry, do not like it and would like to regulate it out of existence. Some of the controls for which they call would enormously damage the industry. We want to ensure that it can continue the generally excellent service that it provides, with the proper safeguards.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Although Conservative Members are whole-heartedly behind the Government's deregulation policy and a first glance might show that the recommendations of the Select Committee on Home Affairs went in the opposite direction, is not the strength of our report this: that this regulation is being called for by the industry itself and that, far from expecting that it will be a burden on the taxpayer, the industry is prepared to pay for it?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. and learned Friend's report from the Select Committee was a valuable contribution to the debate on regulation and control of the industry—there is no doubt about that—but he would be the first to admit that his report, although it made some valid suggestions, did not provide the detailed blueprint that one would require if one were to have proper safeguards in place without damaging the industry, and without heading down the road that many Opposition Members call for, which involves excessive regulation, training, hours of work and every single iota of the private security industry's work.

Mr. Michael: The Minister did not answer the question and he ignored the recommendations of the Select Committee, whose Chairman has just questioned him. The Minister tells us about plans to vet staff, but runs away from the need to regulate the private security industry as a whole, despite the calls of the Labour party, the Select Committee, the police and the private security industry itself. Why will the Home Secretary not face up to the fact that the Government's refusal to legislate is allowing his friends, the crooks, to masquerade as private security firms?

Mr. Maclean: That carefully rehearsed harangue would be much more believable if it came from someone with a credible record on voting on law and order issues, but this is the hon. Gentleman who argued that someone should be given bail if locking him up was bad for his health, and who voted against giving courts powers to impose longer sentences on violent and sexual offenders. He voted against reforming the right of silence, against increasing penalties for people who are cruel to children, against life imprisonment for hard drug dealers and for people who take guns to crime, and, seven times in a row, against the prevention of terrorism Act. If the House had agreed with him and had implemented the policies for which the Labour party voted, serious criminals would be walking the streets today instead of languishing in gaol. No wonder Labour's own Front Benchers described their policies as absolutely ridiculous and complete and utter nonsense. The fact is that one cannot trust Labour on crime.

Metropolitan Police

2. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources he is planning to give to the Metropolitan police in 1996-97. [30262]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I have approved a budget for 1996-97 that will allow the Metropolitan police to spend £29.2 million more this year than last—an increase of almost 2 per cent. and some 90 per cent. more in real terms than in 1979.

Mr. Carrington: Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time to visit Fulham and Hammersmith police stations, both of which have been rebuilt at a cost close to

£10 million? Does that not show the Government's strong commitment to the Metropolitan police, whose 90 per cent. increase in spending in real terms is starting to pay off in the increasingly successful war against drugs, muggings, burglaries and auto crime?

Mr. Howard: I would like to visit my hon. Friend's constituency, and I shall do so when a suitable opportunity arises. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to be as pleased as I am with the performance of the police in the Fulham division, where there has been not only a fall in overall crime but a substantial increase in the clear-up rate, and a fall in auto crime—the theft of and from vehicles—on the most recent figures of no less than 20 per cent. year on year. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the police in Fulham division on their excellent performance in fighting crime.

Mr. Tony Banks: What additional support and resources are being made available to the Metropolitan police in connection with Euro 96? Our police, unfortunately, have acquired the best expertise in dealing with hooliganism and one wants to see them given all necessary support. Have any additional resources been requested, and what steps has the Home Secretary taken to make sure that the police have adequate support?

Mr. Howard: Again, as so often happens, we see Labour Back Bencher after Labour Back Bencher getting up to ask for more money to be spent. We have made generous provision for the Metropolitan police, and out of it they are making available resources to deal with Euro 96—as are other forces throughout the country. Only the antediluvian Opposition Back Benchers think that more money is the answer to everything.

Drugs

3. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the response by the police and courts to those possessing and using drugs. [30263]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): All police forces have specific drugs strategies covering rigid enforcement, with co-operation on rehabilitation and the reduction in demand for drugs. The courts have a wide range of discretion, from fines to life imprisonment.

Mr. Congdon: Given the real dangers of drug taking, does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the police and courts continue to take a tough line with people who take drugs? Is it not important to get across the message to all young people that taking drugs is wrong and will seriously damage their health?

Mr. Sackville: I can reassure my hon. Friend that this Government will have nothing to do with calls for going soft on drugs, legalisation, decriminalisation or anything else. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that the prison population of persons convicted of drug offences has increased from 3,500 to 5,500 in two years. He may be interested to know also that I recently spent a day and an evening with Amsterdam police, when I witnessed the full absurdity of drugs being delivered to the back of so-called coffee shops illegally, then being supplied legally to customers inside. Because the socialists in the coalition that is in power in Holland have absurd policies, that country's police and customs have been undermined and Holland has been turned into the distribution centre for Europe of cocaine and heroin and the source of almost all the amphetamines and Ecstasy that comes into this country. We will not see such policies from this Government, but we would see them from the woolly liberals on the Labour Front Bench.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I congratulate the Northumberland police on their work on drug trafficking in our area. Is the Minister aware that my local authority in Blyth Valley has implemented a policy according to which anyone caught trafficking drugs from a council house will be evicted? I understand that the first case under that policy will go to the High Court.

Mr. Sackville: On the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, I visited his local authority, and I congratulated it on bringing that case. I commend this tough line on drug dealers in council estates to all other local authorities.

Mr. Allason: Is my hon. Friend aware that the eight years' sentence on a convicted drug dealer in Torquay has sent a chill through the illicit underworld in that town? Is he also aware that the police have welcomed this stiff sentencing? It is perfectly clear from events after the conviction of that woman that drug dealing has become very limited in Torbay, forcing drug dealers to go elsewhere.

Mr. Sackville: I congratulate the local police on what they have achieved. There is concern about sentencing drug offenders, which is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has introduced proposals under which all persistent drug dealers will go to prison for a very long time, and they know they will.

Probation

4. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next intends to meet representatives of the probation service to discuss probation issues. [30264]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to meet representatives of the Association of Chief Officers of Probation on 10 July and of the Central Probation Council on 23 July.

Ms Quin: Will the Minister take the opportunity of paying tribute to the work of the probation service and give a commitment to an enhanced and secure role for the service in the future? In the discussions in July, will the Minister respond to the probation service's concerns about the Government's action in removing training qualifications from the probation service? Will the Government also respond fully to the probation service's concerns about the Government's White Paper and the work of the probation service as set out in it?

Mr. Sackville: I am glad to be able to say that Baroness Blatch will meet people in the profession to discuss the new training arrangements. I ask the hon. Lady to request that her allies in politics and in the trade unions desist.

They have been seeking to delay those negotiations in a rearguard attempt to keep the outdated social work degree as a necessary part of training. Any further delay will damage the profession.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Does my hon. Friend think that representatives of the probation service will recommend to him a curfew of children under 10, as recommended by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Member for Blackburn needs to get his house in order and decide exactly what he is recommending to the House. We have heard three different versions of that plan in as many days, which typifies the totally muddled and confused attitude to law and order on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Minister explain to the House how his right hon. and learned Friend proposes to persuade probation officers that that there will be an improvement in penal policy by a 15 per cent. reduction in probation staff this year? Will he also tell the House how the Government will justify the removal from prisons of seconded probation officers, who make an important contribution to the release of prisoners from prison, so that it can be shown—if at all—that prison works?

Mr. Sackville: I do not know where the hon. and learned Gentleman gets his figures, because spending on the probation service has remained constant in real terms. As to prisons, a great deal more work is being done on rehabilitation in prison by prison officers and by drug rehabilitation services, which are now working in prison. A great deal of work is being done.

Immigration (False Documents)

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many false documents were discovered per week in 1995 in the United Kingdom being used by people trying to enter the United Kingdom illegally. [30365]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): During 1995, a total of 4,486 forged or falsified travel documents were detected by immigration officers at United Kingdom ports and airports of entry, an average of 86 detections each week.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that the British people are sick and tired of immigrants who pay nothing and take everything? Does he agree with me that it is time that immigrants paid tax for five years before they can use the health service or take social security benefits? After all, students have to take out loans and pay for their education. Why cannot immigrants do the same? We know that the lot opposite, if they ever got into power, would let everybody in, and the taxpayer would foot the bill.

Mr. Kirkhope: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his robust remarks. It is important to remember that people who come to this country legally find it highly offensive that some people use bogus documents to try to enter the country and thereby take social security benefits and jobs that should be available for those who are here legally. I also congratulate members of the immigration service's national forgery section and the national intelligence section on their work. Many people come from all over the world to see how they work because we have an excellent detection service to prevent abuses of the system.

We are concerned about forged credentials of all kinds. Indeed, we should all be concerned about the Labour party's forged credentials on crime, because, frankly, with such credentials, no one can trust it.

Mr. Henderson: Does the Minister not think that there is a contradiction between his stated desire to get rid of bogus documents and his reply to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), and the Government's policy in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, clause 8 of which introduces provisions that mean that employers will have to recognise up to 40 new documents when they make their checks? Will that not create a forgers charter, in that all the people who are currently making money out of preparing forged immigration documents will now be forging employment documents? The Government should withdraw clause 8 if they genuinely want to get rid of forgery in the context of immigration.

Mr. Kirkhope: If only the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues had been a little more supportive of the Government in this vital aspect of legislation, we might be able to deal with some of the abuses rather more effectively. We want to ensure that people who do not have the proper documentation that entitles them to work should not benefit from the economy of this country. I hope that the Labour party will start to think more carefully about what benefits from the economy should be available to people who are in this country legally and to good employers.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend agree that it will be possible to detect people who are attempting to enter this country using false documents only if we continue to check such documents at the point of entry? Will he confirm that the Government will not in any circumstances accept any attempt by the European Commission to remove our border controls?

Mr. Kirkhope: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We are extremely effective in detecting forged documents, but it is vital that we maintain our present controls to make sure that illegality is stamped out.

Leicester Prison

6. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will pay an official visit to the Welford Road prison, Leicester, to discuss conditions of prisoners and staff. [30266]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I will be making a routine visit to Leicester prison on 27 June.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that, since the Conservative party came to power, crime in Leicestershire has trebled and the population of Leicester prison has risen from 207, which is permitted, to 324? When she

makes her routine visit—which will be very welcome as she has a well-earned reputation for gentle, quiet and caring compassion—will she be kind enough to consider the terrible effect that such overcrowding has, not only on inmates and their rehabilitation but especially on those who are in charge of them and whose life's work it is to work in prison?

Miss Widdecombe: Despite the earnest expression on the hon. and learned Gentleman's face, I think that he must be having a little joke at his own party's expense. He seems to be suggesting that we are responsible for overcrowding in prisons, but, during the Labour party's previous term in office, the prison population was rising by 15 per cent. and the party responded by cutting the prison capital programme by 20 per cent. That was how seriously the Labour party took overcrowding.

In contrast, we have built 22 new prisons, eliminated the practice of trebling, eliminated the use of police cells since last June and reduced the percentage of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one. That should make the hon. and learned Gentleman very happy about our compassionate policy on overcrowding. Will he stand up and congratulate us and apologise?

Mr. Garnier: Before my hon. Friend makes her routine visit to Welford Road prison in Leicester, will she ignore the routine rant of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner)? As it happens, crime in the county of Leicestershire—I am sorry about the city of Leicester—has fallen quite markedly. Will my hon. Friend also make a special visit to Gartree prison, which is on the way to Leicester, which she will find is well run and not overcrowded?

Miss Widdecombe: I can absolutely agree with my hon. and learned Friend. Crime in Leicestershire fell by 5.5 per cent. last year. I congratulate him on giving his constituents the good news and the facts, in comparison with the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West, who wants nothing more than to depress his constituents and paint the worst possible picture. I shall of course be delighted to visit Gartree, although I cannot, of course, guarantee to visit it before I visit Leicester. When I visit both prisons, I shall congratulate the prison staff on a magnificent achievement that is always belittled by the Opposition.

Identity Cards

7. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on his evaluation of the introduction of identity cards. [30267]

Mr. Howard: We are making good progress in our assessment of the responses received to the Green Paper on identity cards. I hope to be able to announce our final decision shortly.

Mr. Dunn: Although my right hon. and learned Friend is awaiting a report from the Select Committee on Home Affairs on the matter, does he agree that one use of a national identity card would be to provide proof of identity by those about to vote in elections? An ID card would prevent wide-scale abuse and impersonation, which is taking place in national and local elections.

Mr. Howard: There is almost no limit to the number of uses that might be made of an identity card. We evaluated many of them in the consultation document that we issued. I know that my hon. Friend is sympathetic to the view that we should await the report of the Home Affairs Committee. I hope to be able to announce our proposals shortly thereafter.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Home Secretary give an assurance that, in the event of an identity card being introduced, it will apply throughout the United Kingdom? Will he take account of the widespread forgery of documents that facilitate personation in elections in certain areas of Northern Ireland? That could be overcome by a single document and enable a greater number of people who have been disfranchised due to arriving to vote with only one part of a driving licence, an out-of-date passport, or whatever, to be entitled to exercise their vote? I exhort him to give that assurance today.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will know that whether our proposals extend in due course to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I shall ensure that the views that the hon. Gentleman has expressed with characteristic forcefulness are drawn to my right hon. and learned Friend's attention.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the smartcard, which is required from people who are applying for payment under social security rules, is a form of voluntary identity card? Could not that smartcard principle be applied to a host of other circumstances in which the citizen comes into contact with the agencies of the state?

Mr. Howard: That is indeed a possibility. My hon. Friend has identified one way in which identity cards might develop. The smartcard technology might not be available for general-purpose use for some time, but we shall clearly bear it in mind.

Mr. Straw: Crime has doubled in the past 17 years, which represents the worst record of any British Government since the war, and the worst record among the Governments of 16 western countries surveyed by the Home Office. Against that background, we can all understand the synthetic hysteria that we have heard from the Government Dispatch Box this afternoon. On 1 April last year, the Prime Minister, opening the Conservative party's local election campaign, said that compulsory identity cards would

"deter crime and make it more likely that we will catch criminals".

May we now have a categorical undertaking from the Home Secretary that that remains the Government's policy?

Mr. Howard: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman talks about synthetic hysteria, because he is an expert in the real thing. The shadow Chief Whip says that his proposals for a curfew are unworkable, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) says that they are ridiculous, and the Association of Chief Police Officers' spokesman says that they would give rise to huge practical difficulties. The only curfew that the Labour party is ever likely to impose is a curfew on the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr.

Straw) himself. It all goes to show that the Labour party cannot be trusted on crime. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] The hon. Gentleman began his question by talking about crime, so I am answering about crime.

As for identity cards, the hon. Gentleman will know that we have always made it plain that we are considering the range of identity card proposals, voluntary and compulsory, and we shall make our decision known in due course.

Madam Speaker: Order. Perhaps I might at this juncture refer the Secretary of State to answers that I gave yesterday to points of order concerning the answering of questions. They are recorded in column 609 of yesterday's *Hansard.*

Prisoners (Reform)

9. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent action has been taken to make prisons better at reforming prisoners. [30270]

Miss Widdecombe: It is central to the Prison Service's mission statement that it helps prisoners to lead law-abiding lives both in custody and after release. Recent action to reduce reoffending and reform prisoners includes the introduction of a scheme of incentives and earned privileges, an increase in the number of hours that prisoners spend in purposeful activity, mandatory drugs testing, and strengthened offending behaviour programmes.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Bearing in mind the low level of education of many prisoners, does she agree that every penny spent on education for those in prison is well spent, and is especially helpful in reforming them and in enabling them to lead useful lives after prison?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why we have brought about a massive increase in education spending in our prisons, and in the amount of education spending per prisoner, and why the number of student hours in our prisons is nearly double the number that we inherited from the Labour party.

Mr. Pike: Despite what the Minister says, is it not important that the opportunities offered at prisons such as Risley for prisoners to be trained into jobs, and to be able find employment when they leave prison, should be available to every prisoner in every prison, so that there is a real possibility of reducing crime and prisoners do not have to end up back in prison?

Miss Widdecombe: Proper employment opportunities for prisoners do indeed play an important role in rehabilitation, and preparation for employment in outside life is certainly part of that role. That is why there has been a vast increase in employment opportunities for prisoners, and such a substantial increase in the number of hours of purposeful activity spent by prisoners and in the number of national vocational qualifications and other qualifications gained by prisoners. The hon. Gentleman was right; he merely failed to congratulate us on what we are doing in that respect.

Mr. Ashby: My hon. Friend outlined improvements in the Prison Service and in the welfare of prisoners in answer to an earlier question. Is she aware that, in evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee yesterday, it was noticeable that the privately run prisons were at the forefront of those improvements, and that the welfare and well-being of prisoners was better in private prisons than in the public sector? Does that not show that our policies are the right policies?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that private sector prisons have an excellent record of achievement, with one being praised by the chief inspector of prisons as a model of good practice. My hon. Friend did not mention that that has been achieved with more cost-effectiveness and greater value for money than we currently achieve in the public sector. But there are also excellent examples in the public sector and it is in the interests of the Prison Service as a whole that good practice should be disseminated, no matter where it originates. I hope that the Opposition will bear that in mind when pouring scorn on private sector prisons that have achieved so much.

Closed Circuit Television

10. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he has used to decide on the allocation of Government grant to closed circuit television schemes. [30271]

Mr. Maclean: Bids made under the CCTV challenge competition are being assessed against the criteria set out in the bidding guidance issued on 22 November. Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Library. We shall be announcing the results of the competition in early summer.

Mr. Rendel: In the first round of grants, we had the absurd situation of a grant being offered to the then Conservative-led Wokingham district council, which then refused to take up the scheme, while no grant was offered to Newbury—then led by the Liberal Democrats—which went ahead with the scheme anyway because it was determined to push ahead with crime prevention. Will the Minister assure us that the criteria will not allow such a ridiculous situation to arise again and that, this time, grants will be given to the authorities that want to use them?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is being rather careful in his use of language. Throughout the country, Liberal Democrat and Labour-controlled councils have been consistently hostile to CCTV. Those councils may now be queuing up to take money from a Tory Government to set up CCTV schemes, but they have been hostile to its use in the past. We will judge all bids for CCTV fairly and honestly. If a council does not make use of the money, it will lose it and the money will go into the Treasury coffers. If a council can use the money allocated to it, it can hang on to it. Newbury will be treated the same as the other applicants—they will all be treated fairly. But the hon. Gentleman should not pretend that the Liberals have liked CCTV, although they are keen to take our money now.

Mr. Tracey: May I commend to my right hon. Friend the grant application from the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames? Kingston has one of the most vibrant and successful shopping centres in the south of England, but that centre provides opportunities for crime. CCTV would ensure that the crime rate in Kingston fell, as it should.

Mr. Maclean: Of course, the police in Kingston have been successful in ensuring that the crime rate is reduced. I repeat that all applications for CCTV funding from the extra money that we have made available—an increase from £5 million to £15 million—will be carefully considered before we come to a decision.

Mrs. Ewing: We all recognise that CCTV is an innovation and that its success in the prevention and detection of crime has yet to be proved. The Minister, who knows my constituency, may realise that there is a danger that the application of CCTV may drive organised criminal gangs out of city centres and into rural areas. What action will he take to ensure that rural areas are not subjected to increased crime as a result of what is happening in city centres?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Lady's question would have been better directed to the Scottish Office, but I can refer her to Scottish Office and Home Office research which shows that the displacement that she fears has not occurred. I can speak with authority for England and Wales on this matter, as I am the Minister responsible. The latest crime figures in those countries show that the police in rural areas have been every bit as successful in cracking down on crime as the police in metropolitan areas. In 1995, crime fell even more in rural or non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan ones. I cannot give the figures for Scotland.

Schengen Agreement

11. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next intends to discuss developments in the Schengen agreement treaty procedures with his EU counterparts from the relevant participating member states. [30272]

Mr. Howard: I frequently discuss developments in Schengen when I meet my European Union counterparts, and I make it plain that the United Kingdom has no intention of signing the convention as it would be inconsistent with the maintenance of our frontier controls.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the fact, that, once we have the strict original entry control procedures for the common Community frontier and the proper Europol arrangements for intelligence information sharing, he will have no reason to have such a lack of self-confidence in his attitude to the excellent Schengen agreement? This country should keep an open mind about the agreement and join it. Pending that, will my right hon. and learned Friend reconsider the bureaucratic, cumbersome and slow entry procedures for many entrants at our ports, especially Dover, where it is much slower for foot passengers than for motorists?

Mr. Howard: I certainly disagree with the first part of my hon. Friend's question. We have natural advantages in frontier control because we are an island, and we have absolutely no intention whatever of dismantling those controls or doing away with them, whatever improvements may be made in the external frontier of the European Union. Our intention is in sharp contrast with the policies of the Liberal Democrats especially, and also with the Labour party.

On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, the present procedures that are in place in Dover are no more than are necessary to ensure the existence of effective controls.

Prison Education

12. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister of State last visited a prison in the south-west of England to discuss prison education. [30274]

Miss Widdecombe: I have visited a number of prison establishments in the south-west, including of course the Verne and Portland in my hon. Friend's constituency. My most recent visit to a prison in the south-west was on 8 January and I will be undertaking a further series of visits to the south-west in September. I discuss a wide range of issues, including education, whenever I visit a prison establishment.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and for her welcome visit to my constituency. Does she feel that the greater link between prison education and local education facilities—for example, Weymouth college in my constituency—has been beneficial in ensuring that the education that prisoners receive is in line with that received by the community, so that qualifications can be transferred when they re-enter the community after their sentence?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed I can confirm that. Further, the arrangements that we have made to contract out education locally give greater flexibility and greater clarity and have generally been welcomed as an initiative by governors and staff.

Mr. George Howarth: The Minister may be aware that I visited the young offenders institute in the constituency of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) yesterday. I have visited a number of prisons, as has the Minister. Is she aware that a recent survey, which covered the south-west and the rest of the country, revealed that on average 14.5 per cent. will be cut from prison service education—in some prisons, the figure is as high as 83 per cent.—which will lead to the loss of 300 jobs and 16,000 prison education hours? Is that what the Minister means when she says that she is committed to rehabilitation through education? The reality is that there will be fewer hours, fewer teachers, less education and less chance of education stopping reoffending. Is the Minister not ashamed of that record?

Miss Widdecombe: As ever, the Opposition are totally incapable of distinguishing between quality and quantity. I will give the hon. Gentleman some of the facts. We inherited from the last Labour Government—

[Interruption.] The House is going to hear this. We inherited a real-terms expenditure of £17,800 per prisoner and we have increased that to £26,000 per prisoner. That is what we have achieved, and that shows the callous neglect of prisoners by the Labour Government. They neglected overcrowding, they neglected purposeful activity, they neglected education—

Mr. Henderson: This is a world record.

Miss Widdecombe: As the hon. Gentleman suggests, I could go on for a long time detailing the Opposition's neglect. By contrast, we have reduced overcrowding, increased purposeful activity, increased education, increased qualifications and introduced and increased offending behaviour programmes. We actually care about rehabilitation because it protects the general public. You cannot trust the Labour party to protect the general public.

Crime

13. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his latest initiatives to combat crime. [30275]

Mr. Maclean: We are taking a wide range of effective action to reduce crime and create safer communities. Record funding for the police, money for 5,000 more officers, the encouragement of closed circuit television and crime prevention partnerships and changes in the criminal law have already cut crime by more than 8 per cent. over the past three years. Our new sentencing proposals will create safer communities in future.

Mr. Amess: In my right hon. Friend's efforts to combat crime, does he intend to introduce a curfew for children up to the age of 10 after 9 o'clock at night? If so, will he consider extending it to members of the shadow Cabinet in view of their many public embarrassing disagreements?

Mr. Maclean: The shambles that now passes for Labour policy creation has given us three different policies in three days on the issue, and I suspect that if President Clinton made another speech tomorrow we would see a fourth version of the policy proposed by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). A fourth curfew policy will probably also be imposed by the Labour Chief Whip, stating that the shadow Cabinet team should not be let out in public after 2.30 pm.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30291]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Michael: Will the Prime Minister join the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in rejecting the idea of sixth form vouchers, or will he give in to the chairman of the Conservative party who has been telling newspapers that the right hon. Lady should be sacked?

The Prime Minister: No, he has not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, yes he has."] No, he has not. I know that the Opposition are a pantomime and I am tempted to say, "Oh no he hasn't." I saw the story in the press this morning and fair old nonsense it was.

Mr. Walden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our overriding attitude towards Europe should be to persuade our partners against further integration? If so, does he think that his tactics on beef enhance or diminish our powers of persuasion?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to have my hon. Friend's support against further integration of a federal nature in the European Union. That is right. The issues are dealt with on their own merits.

On the question of beef, I very much welcome the decision taken yesterday by the Commission, which is a first step. My right hon. and learned Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have had a series of constructive meetings, including meetings this morning, on the issue. I hope that we shall be able to make progress by agreement.

Mr. Blair: With reference to what the Foreign Secretary described as a turning point in the beef crisis, have the Italians simply agreed—as I understand it—to try to use their best endeavours to secure agreement with other European Union countries, or have the Italians now agreed to support the lifting of the ban and the British position?

The Prime Minister: No—the Italians, who have the presidency, have now seen the framework document that we have produced and are using their best endeavours to see whether we can reach an agreement in advance of Florence. We have not finally discussed every aspect of that agreement with the Italians—that is happening at the moment, as it is with others. I hope that, as discussions continue over the next few days, we shall be able to reach an agreement. It is not certain, but I think that we have made a good deal of progress in the past few days, which is encouraging.

Mr. Blair: May I then ask the Prime Minister whether it is still his clear policy and expectation that by the Florence summit there will be a firm agreement to lift the ban completely within a specified time scale?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated when I announced the policy at the outset, we required two things before the ban is lifted completely. The first was the removal of the ban on beef derivatives, which has been obtained, and the second was a framework so that we were aware of precisely what needed to be done before the ban was lifted entirely. I very much hope that that will be achieved before Florence, but it is not solely in my hands. We can

advance the case, and we are doing so; we need the agreement of the Commission and our partners across the European Union, which is what we are seeking to obtain.

Mr. Blair: I am sure that the Prime Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I gather from what he is saying that a time scale is not necessarily part of the negotiation.

I return to the question of cost that I put to the Prime Minister on Tuesday. He said then that it would not be part of the negotiation because of the refunding mechanism from the European Union. Will he confirm that the refunding in respect of the 30-month cattle slaughter scheme will come mainly out of the British rebate and that the net cost to Britain will therefore be some £2 billion, with several hundred million pounds extra for all sorts of other items? May I put it to the Prime Minister that, if the negotiation neither has a time scale nor an improvement in compensation, on any basis the price that this country will be paying for the beef crisis will be with us for many years to come?

The Prime Minister: The beef crisis is a very serious crisis. There is no doubt that it is expensive for this country. That has been the case from the outset. We set out what the costs were at the beginning. To reassure people on public health, there is a substantial price to be paid, and we see that in the destruction of animals and in the consequent compensation to farmers. We wish to get rid of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, first, on public health grounds; secondly, to restore consumer confidence; and, of course, for the overriding reason that we wish international confidence in British beef to be fully restored.

As far as the negotiations on time scale are concerned, we are seeking not an arbitrary calendar date but the steps that need to be taken—

Mr. Skinner: A retreat is on the way.

The Prime Minister: This is what I said at the outset. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) does not understand very much. If he understood a little more, he would probably interrupt a little less.

As I said at the outset, we are seeking a framework—that is to say, the steps that must be taken to enable us to remove the ban. That is what I stated here when the ban was introduced. That remains our policy and it has not changed one whit.

Mr. Lamont: Does the Prime Minister recall that, during the Napoleonic wars, Samuel Whitbread, the founder of the modern business, was always predicting defeat and urging the Government to open negotiations with Napoleon? Will the Prime Minister ignore the successors to Samuel Whitbread in the Confederation of British Industry who want to throw in the towel and who seem so indifferent to the plight of small businesses and farmers? Will he tell the chairman of Unilever to stick to cream cakes and detergents?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend puts the point with great clarity and precision. As he rightly says, there are a large number of small businesses—650,000 people are dependent on the beef industry, and it is in the interests of the people whose livelihoods are in the beef industry that we need to reach a satisfactory conclusion to this affair and restore the confidence in the international beef trade, which has been lost because of the lack of confidence and, frankly, the rather over-exaggerated response to the problem that we have had in the past. My right hon. Friend is entirely right to say that that is the priority.

Q2. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30292]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoyle: Has the Prime Minister seen reports in the *Daily Express* that his predecessor, Baroness Thatcher, is calling for non-payment of bills to the European Union? Will he condemn that bizarre, foolish and reckless attempt at law breaking?

The Prime Minister: I responded to that point several Question Times ago, and my response would not change today.

Q3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30293]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that gas bills, electricity bills and telephone bills have been slashed since privatisation? Does he welcome today's news that there will be a windfall rebate of £38 for gas consumers? Did he welcome the £50 rebate for electricity consumers? Does this not show that the regulator has already altered the proposals for a windfall tax of £3 billion into a shortfall tax?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right: privatisation and the regulator are reducing the prices of a large number of utilities. There has been a rebate of £50 on electricity bills and there will be a rebate on gas bills. The regulator is blowing to pieces the prospect that there might be resources for an artificial windfall tax to fund putative expenditure by any other political party. Opposition Members below the Gangway may not know that the Labour party's industry spokesman is claiming that his party should embrace competition. I will not comment on the look of horror on the faces of the Opposition Members below the Gangway after hearing that.

Q4. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30294]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Prime Minister agree with me that it is totally unacceptable for Yorkshire Water to show a profit of £162 million when it had a dreadful record on water supply, on leakage, on charges to customers and on investment during that period? Does

the Prime Minister not think that it is time to revisit that regulator for tougher sanctions so that we can slake the fat cats and their thirst for profits? It is time that we had tougher regulations.

The Prime Minister: In that case, the hon. Gentleman will support the water regulator, who took action against Yorkshire Water to cut its prices earlier this week.

Mr. Viggers: May I ask my right hon. Friend to spare a moment during his busy day for the plight of people involved in a small section of the beef industry, the cow head de-boning sector? Is he aware that this small industry, which is made up of about a dozen mainly family-owned companies, has been driven out of business by the Government order of 28 March banning head meat? I ask my right hon. Friend to take the modest step of authorising the Ministry of Agriculture to discuss the amount of loss with the industry involved.

The Prime Minister: I will invite my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture to examine that matter and then to contact my hon. Friend.

Q5. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30295]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Is it not time that the Prime Minister put a stop to the hypocrisy of the Tories being the party of the family? Perhaps he could take a tip from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and impose a curfew on his Ministers in the hope that they might sleep in their own beds rather than someone else's.

The Prime Minister: The policy of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—which does not seem to carry the support of his Chief Whip—is for a curfew for people under the age of 10.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Has my right hon. Friend seen the advertisement in today's paper supporting a new political party in this country? Will he take the opportunity to confirm that he will always heed the views of the British people to stay part of the European Union so long as it is a part of a Europe of separate states and never part of a federated super-state of Europe?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I did see that advertisement this morning and I am happy to confirm that no Government that I lead will enter into a federal Europe. I have argued for a Europe of nation states and I shall continue to do so. I am delighted to see that there seems to be some support for that in other quarters as well, as was highlighted by the advertisement.

Q6. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30296]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: If money is available for tax giveaways in the next budget, will the Prime Minister guarantee that it will be put into the health service and the education service of this country?

The Prime Minister: We have increased the resources for the health service above the level of inflation year after year after year. I shall not make any projections about what will happen in the Budget some months hence, but I note the hon. Gentleman's expectation that the economy is doing well enough to mean that it might place us in a position to reduce taxes or increase expenditure. I am grateful for that unsolicited commendation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's management of the economy.

Mr. Thomason: Has my right hon. Friend noted that the Rover Group, which is based partly in my constituency, has put in figures for the first quarter of this year showing an increase of 10 per cent. in production, and that the group's exports are up even more? Can he confirm that it is his policy to encourage enterprise, and that that sort of improvement would be severely damaged by the Labour party's policies?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that. I can also confirm that, in terms of growth, inflation, falling unemployment, investment and many other areas of economic management, this country is now leading any of our competitor countries in Europe as a result of decisions that the present Government have taken in recent years.

Q7. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30297]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Prime Minister recall that the Labour party proposed an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill to tighten up on the sale of handguns by mail order? In view of the evidence given at the Dunblane inquiry that one of the guns used to kill those children was sold by mail order by a firm in my constituency, will the Government reconsider their policy and introduce legislation to tighten up or even to ban the sale of handguns by mail order?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government have indeed strengthened firearms controls in recent years. Most self-loading and pump action rifles have been banned and a range of other changes have been made. As the whole House knows, we have given Lord Cullen a very wide remit and he may make recommendations to the Government. We will consider those very seriously, discuss them with other parties in the House and then decide what action needs to be taken.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Leader of the House please set out the business for next week and the week after?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Arbitration Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 11 JUNE—Opposition Day [14th allotted day].

Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on standards in education, followed by a debate on the prior options review. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 13 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

Motion on the Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order.

FRIDAY 14 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Provisionally, the business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Family Law Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 18 JUNE—Opposition Day [15th allotted day].

There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on sentencing policy on a Government motion, followed by a motion on the Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order.

THURSDAY 20 JUNE—A debate on the European Union—the usual six-monthly debate—on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 21 JUNE—A debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House, subject not decided.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 12 June, there will be a debate in European Standing Committee A on the conservation of wetlands.

[*Wednesday 12 June: European Standing Committee A—European Community Document: 8564/95, Conservation of Wetlands. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: HC 51-xiii (1995-96) and HC 51-i (1995-96).*]

Mr. Rooker: I thank the Leader of the House for outlining two full weeks' business. That is very helpful.

Consideration of the remaining stages of the Family Law Bill is set down for Monday 17 June. First, I plead with the Leader of the House to help hon. Members to take a considered view of that legislation. It will have a very direct and personal effect on our fellow citizens and we owe it to them and to their families to consider it in a grown-up manner. I ask the Leader of the House to arrange for a note to be placed in the Vote Office listing all the amendments that the Government seek to maintain or to overturn, along with any Government amendments for the Report stage.

It would be quite wrong to publish amendments only on the Friday—which is a non-sitting Friday—before a key debate on the following Monday. In the normal course of events, those amendments would not be put down until Thursday and then published on Friday. That is quite unacceptable in this case, and the House should receive advance notice of the Government's views.

Secondly, does the Leader of the House accept that the 58,000 families living in Ministry of Defence married quarters have a legitimate interest in knowing the nationality of the would-be purchasers whom Defence Ministers are lining up to buy their homes for lease back? As it will not affect commercial confidentiality, will the Leader of the House arrange for a Ministry of Defence statement about the nationality of the unknown bidders—information that was yesterday refused to the Defence Committee?

Finally, I refer to an issue that was mentioned in passing during Prime Minister's questions. Has the Leader of the House noticed the community interest in the proceedings of the House next Tuesday as evidenced by the extensive advertising in today's newspapers regarding the ten-minute Bill, the Referendum Bill? While not wishing to discuss the pros and cons of that proposal, I ask the Leader of the House to arrange for a debate about the need to set financial limits on national political advertising.

It cannot be right that people such as Sir James Goldsmith can seek to invent a political party, buy up a democracy and spend a fortune either trying to influence or to replace hon. Members outside the financial limits that are imposed by the Representation of the People Act 1989. There is no legal limit on national political advertising, and the House should address that matter.

Mr. Newton: On the last point, it is difficult to see how the hon. Gentleman's proposal would work in practice. I add also—I hope without too much barb—that, in the light of the amount of trade union advertising that sometimes appears during general election campaigns, it is a rather odd point for an Opposition Front Bencher to raise.

As to the hon. Gentleman's second point about the Ministry of Defence houses, I cannot add to what was said or not said during the recent meeting of the Select Committee. However, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is due to answer questions on Tuesday.

As to the hon. Gentleman's first point—which he made in a serious and a considered way—I shall ensure that it receives the serious consideration that it deserves from my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and those concerned with the Bill in the House.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): When my right hon. Friend considers whether Ministers should

make ministerial statements to the House in the next two weeks, will he bear it in mind that a great opportunity has been missed in not announcing the success of British diplomacy at the recent North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial council, in enabling France to rejoin the military organisation of NATO? Therefore, can we have a wide-ranging debate on foreign affairs at the earliest possible date or, alternatively, a ministerial statement to rectify that rather sad omission?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise either a debate—certainly not of a dedicated kind—at an early stage or a statement. I draw attention once again to the fact that the matter could be raised during Defence questions next Tuesday and Foreign Office questions next Wednesday. There will be the usual debate on defence estimates later in the Session, but I cannot predict when that might occur.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I also thank the Leader of the House for giving us two weeks' business, and associate myself with the points made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about the Family Law Bill and the need for proper consideration of any amendments to what is clearly a controversial measure? On the debate that the Leader of the House has announced for a fortnight today, which he describes as the routine six-monthly debate on the European Union, why, for the third time in a row, are the Government not willing to have a debate on anything controversial on anything other than a motion for the Adjournment of the House? We had such a debate on the common agricultural policy and the Scott report, and we still have not debated the big European issue—the Government's non-co-operation policy. Why cannot we have a debate on a substantive motion so that the House can declare its view on whether Parliament supports the Government's policy?

Mr. Newton: On the points about the intergovernmental conference and the Scott report, I have been over the arguments endlessly in the House and elsewhere. On the normal six-monthly debate on the European Union that the House expects to take place before each European Council meeting—there is nothing new about that—I can say only that, since 1993, all such debates have been on a motion for the Adjournment. Of the six that I have looked at, four have been on motions for the Adjournment. It is the sensible and normal way to consider such matters.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Could we arrange for an early and urgent debate on the impending postal strike? Many of us may wish to have the opportunity to condemn the damage that such a strike would cause our constituents privately, commercially and industrially. We would condemn the strike from the Conservative Benches, but would expect silence from the Labour party.

Mr. Newton: I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that the Government still very much hope that a strike can be avoided. It would clearly be damaging to industry and to the Post Office itself. I was the Minister at the time of the last such strike, which was undoubtedly damaging to the Post Office. The Post Office management has made it clear that it sees scope for further progress through negotiation, and I would prefer to concentrate on whether that negotiation will be successful.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): May we have a statement next week on the latest position in respect of the millennium festival? In that statement, will the Minister explain to the House why, regardless of the difficulties in Greenwich, under no circumstances will Birmingham be able to stage the festival? Why are the Government waging a persistent vendetta against the west midlands? People in the west midlands will certainly have their say about that at the next election.

Mr. Newton: I understand why the hon. Gentleman, as a west midlands Member, chooses to use such language, but I do not accept the suggestion that there is any such vendetta. Both my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who are members of the Millennium Commission, met business leaders yesterday with Sir Peter Levene, who now has until the end of June to continue his negotiations with private sector investors. We should await the outcome of that work.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate next week on the upbringing of children, so that we may debate the punishment of children where it is necessary, including parents' right to smack without regret, having acted properly? Could we note the importance and the value of restoring corporal punishment in schools and that the Leader of the Opposition voted against corporal punishment in schools when it was last debated in the House, despite his weasel words yesterday?

Mr. Newton: I recall that the last time the Opposition told us that they were having a debate on standards in education, as they are planning for next Tuesday, they changed it to another subject at a very late stage. Perhaps we shall see a change to the subject that my hon. Friend has in mind.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House find Government time next week for an urgent debate on the growing trade whereby tour operators lease foreign aircraft to carry British holidaymakers without being able to check on the airworthiness of those aircraft? Is that not an urgent and worrying problem, particularly at the beginning of the holiday season?

Mr. Newton: If I may, I shall draw that serious question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and express the hope that the hon. Lady might get the opportunity to ask him about the matter directly and personally on Monday.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Can my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the problems created by new age travellers, especially the untold damage among sheep caused by their marauding dogs, the hygiene risks and the fact that their girocheques seem to chase them around the country? When they are not where they are expected to be, they cause no end of trouble, as they did yesterday.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend knows well that the problems arising from some of those incidents have, in recent years, been the subject of concern and action by

[Mr. Newton]

both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary via the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. I shall bring my hon. Friend's continuing concern to their attention.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Could the Leader of the House alter this Monday's order of business as, on that day, the Scottish Grand Committee is meeting and, we understand, the negotiating body in Northern Ireland is meeting, which would affect hon. Members? May I press him on the business on Wednesday 19 June? Will there be an hour and a half or longer for the Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order? Will it be possible on that occasion, for the Leader of the House to introduce a motion to allow the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to move from place to place and to allow us to speak in plain English?

Mr. Newton: Having had an engaging little debate last night on Welsh, I do not think that I wish to add to what was said then, including in an intervention by one of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends. I cannot undertake to change the order of business on Monday, having only just announced it. On the Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order, the debate would normally last an hour and a half. I am considering the possibility of providing a bit more time, and I might take the hon. Gentleman's words as a representation to that effect.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Could my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on transport policy, so that I could raise two issues? One is the increased prioritisation of resources for bypasses in rural areas such as my constituency of Ribble Valley, and the second is the policy of the European Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock, who was wisely rejected by the British public, but who is now intent on having a European integrated transport policy, which means that he would be doing a smash and grab on British sovereign policy and power. He must be told clearly that he will not be allowed to do so.

Mr. Newton: Obviously, I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's request for a debate. He, in turn, will know of the United Kingdom Government's clear position on suggestions about the Commission negotiating on behalf of the whole European Union in respect, for example, of airline access agreements.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the question of Goldsmith's money has been raised in the run-up to the general election, if we are to have a healthy democracy, would it not be wise to have a public statement by the Government on the funding of all political parties, so that such funding became transparent, as it is in the Labour party—every trade union penny is recorded for the public to see? Every donation over £1,000 should be recorded by all political parties. Why is it that the Tory party was £19 million in debt last year and is now £26 million in surplus? Where has the money come from? Has it come from overseas? We would like to know, because, if the Government can sort out their own finances, why is the public sector borrowing requirement going through the roof?

Mr. Newton: I imagine that you, Madam Speaker, were able to discern a request connected with the business in that. In so far as I could discern anything, it was a request for a statement and I can say only that I have no plans for such a statement.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Could we have a debate next week on youth discipline, because we have just found unexpected support for corporal punishment for unruly youths from the Leader of the Opposition? As far as I understood it, the only caning that he supported was for unruly Labour Back Benchers.

Mr. Newton: I have already commented on that matter, and clearly my hon. Friend would support any request to change the subject of next Tuesday's debate.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): May I gently pursue with the Leader of the House the business on Monday relating to the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Scottish Grand Committee will be meeting in Ayr that morning. I have been advised that the most critical vote on the Bill will occur at about 6 o'clock. It would be impossible for many of my colleagues in Scotland of all political parties to return to the House to vote at that time. We shall also be seeing the start of what we hope will be the peace process talks in Northern Ireland. I ask the Leader of the House seriously and genuinely to reconsider Monday's business and to ensure that no vote is taken early.

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to attempt to dictate the pattern of business. I appreciate why the hon. Lady felt it necessary, as she put it in her usual kindly way, gently to pursue me, but I cannot add to my earlier remarks. We cannot, because of meetings elsewhere—whether in Scotland, Northern Ireland or, when appropriate, Wales—become what would amount to a two-day-week Parliament in Westminster.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on early-day motion 943?

[*That this House notes with sad regret the fatal shooting of Stelios Panayi, a 19-year-old Greek Cypriot soldier who had left his post as a friendly gesture to exchange military hats with a Turkish soldier on the dividing 'Green Line' in Cyprus; further regrets that this shooting is just one more in a long series of such murders; is saddened by the fact that after 22 years of division it is still necessary, for the security of the indigenous people of Cyprus, for a UN peacekeeping force to keep vigil on the border, whilst 30,000 Turkish troops in the occupied area pose a threat to all Cypriots; wishes Britain's special envoy, Sir David Hannay, a successful trip to Cyprus in his efforts to advance towards an agreement which will result in a free united Cyprus on a federal basis, a solution which has thus far been hindered solely by the reluctance and refusal of the Turkish side in negotiations to display any sign of political will; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to redouble its efforts to find a lasting and just settlement.*]

That would allow the House to welcome the appointment of Sir David Hannay to try to sort out the problems of Cyprus, which have lasted far too long. Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is intolerable that

hundreds of thousands of people should have been deprived of the right to live in their own homes since 1974?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for Sir David's appointment, which is intended to strengthen the efforts that the British Government have continuously made to help the process of achieving a peaceful settlement in Cyprus—which is clearly the only permanent solution to the problem to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I appreciate the assistance that the Leader of the House has given in the past in respect of MV Derbyshire. The view is widely held among hon. Members of all parties that the families affected by that tragedy have not received a fair deal from the Government. It came as a shock to learn that the marine technologists who made the first visit to MV Derbyshire are being precluded from joining the assessors on the next voyage, which is an absolute scandal. I would much appreciate it if the right hon. Gentleman conveyed the feelings of many hon. Members that the Secretary of State for Transport should seriously reconsider that matter.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for the way in which the hon. Gentleman prefaced his question. In the spirit in which I have always approached him previously on the matter, of course I shall convey his remarks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—who will be in the House to answer questions next Monday. I take the opportunity to mention, I hope not indiscreetly, that I have already had a word with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, following my conversation with the hon. Gentleman earlier this week.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Is it not time that the House again debated the funding of the BBC? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the 1991 consolidated licence fee regulations state that a licence is required to install and use television receivers at a single place specified on the licence? Could the House debate the circumstances in which one licence could be used for two different addresses in particular circumstances?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a debate on that matter, but it may be in order to raise it in relation to the Broadcasting Bill, which is in Committee and will return to the Floor of the House in due course. I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Is the Leader of the House aware of the dismay and confusion caused by the decision of the President of the Board of Trade to nod through the American bid for Midlands Electricity? Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the President to explain to the House his policy in regard to mergers and takeovers, because the industry is currently in total confusion? There seems to be no rationality behind the President's decisions on those matters. One week he will refuse a merger or a vertical integration, but, soon after, he will approve an American takeover of Midlands Electricity. Will the Leader of the House bring the President of the Board of Trade to the House to explain his actions?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise to bring the President of the Board of Trade to the House in quite the manner that the hon. Gentleman suggests, although I can say that the President is due to answer questions in the House on Wednesday 19 June. The only other comment that I shall make, in view of the anti-American flavour of the hon. Gentleman's question—I do not know whether it was intended—is that it is important to remember that this country has huge investments in America, and it has generally benefited from incoming overseas investment and from our investment overseas.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the Leader of the House recall that recently I asked him for a debate on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991? Since then, Jessie—a bitch that was lame and had no teeth—has been destroyed, and Buster has been on dogs' death row for approximately five years. Can we please have a debate on that Act? It is costing the police hundreds of thousands of pounds in kennelling, and it is causing a great deal of suffering for pet owners, and for dogs that are waiting to be destroyed.

Magistrates have no discretion in that matter, although they would like to exercise it. Perhaps we should have a debate with a view to getting an agreed amendment to the Act, through the usual channels, before we rise for the summer recess. That would be greatly welcomed by all hon. Members, and it would certainly be greatly welcomed by animal lovers across the country.

Mr. Newton: I recall the hon. Gentleman's previous question, and I think—although I cannot recall exactly—that I made the point that that was a good subject for a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate. That is certainly my view, and he might like to consider it.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Paul Tyler—I am sorry; Mr. Paul Flynn.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Banks: Say it in Welsh.

Mr. Flynn: No, I dare not.

Has not the case been made that we need to have a debate on the issue of national spending on elections? The Leader of the House has just admitted that he does not know how we could introduce national spending limits. If we had such a debate, we could explain to him the result of my Bill—it will be debated on Second Reading on 12 July—which will reintroduce the national spending limits that operated until the mid-1970s.

If we do not have such a debate and if we do not introduce spending limits, any person, country or malign organisation—overseas or in this country—could spend unlimited millions of pounds on influencing our elections and buying votes. The Government have refused to introduce limits in the past, to protect the integrity of our democratic system. Will they now do it in their party's self-interest?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I should make the point that the suggestion by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) appears to be related not to election periods but to preventing people from advertising their views on an on-going basis—if I understood his

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suggestion at all. I have no doubt that I, in common with other hon. Members, will examine with customary fascination the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), provided it is in English and not in Welsh.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Could we have some Government time for a debate on the interests of and disadvantages for the Britons who occupy the Rock of Gibraltar? Is the Leader of the House aware that the people of Gibraltar are currently enduring inordinate and unreasonable delays on the border? That is unacceptable. Those are Britons and, ultimately, this is their Parliament. There is a democratic deficit because they have no representation in the House. Every hon. Member therefore has an obligation to the people of Gibraltar, who are not represented in this place. Is it not time that we had a debate about their future, their complaints and the disadvantages that they suffer because of the Spanish authorities?

Mr. Newton: As usual, I shall bear in mind that request—as I do other requests—for a debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government have consistently made clear their desire to do the best for the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): Could the Leader of the House find time in the next few weeks to debate the performance of Premier Health NHS trust in my constituency, which is proposing to close a residential mental health unit less than 12 months after it was opened? We understand that there are financial difficulties but, although the area health authority is conducting a consultation, the contractors are already implementing the decision to close the unit before the public have had a chance to express their views. The public are understandably incensed and wish to re-establish their rights in the consultation process. It would do a great deal of good if the House were to re-establish those rights before any action was taken.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I am not in a position to comment off the cuff from the Dispatch Box on a particular case of which I was not hitherto aware. However, it is clear that I should—and I will—bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who is the Minister with the relevant responsibility in respect of social services overall, although not individual departments, and—certainly—health.

Points of Order

4 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I gave your office notice this morning that I would seek to catch your eye about a matter on which I seek your guidance.

I am perplexed, and perhaps other hon. Members are too, about a Bill that is still at its preliminary stage. I must emphasise that I have not yet had a chance today to notify my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) that I would raise the matter. As the House knows, my hon. Friend is the promoter of a ten-minute Bill that is due to be introduced next Tuesday. It deals with referendums and other matters related to our membership of the European Union.

However, I noticed—I am sure that other hon. Members have, too—the text of the Bill in the newspapers, yesterday and today. Of course, the ten-minute Bill procedure means that a Bill is not printed until after its formal First Reading—

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Leave is granted merely to "bring in" a Bill.

Mr. Dykes: Indeed; the hon. Gentleman reminds me of the correct wording. Prima facie, it might seem a breach of parliamentary privilege that a Bill is given to the press before hon. Members have had the opportunity to see the text. That might be especially awkward in this instance, as those who support the eccentric ideas expressed in the Bill are most anxious to preserve the sacred sovereignty of the House.

Madam Speaker: The Government are frequently encouraged to print Bills in advance so that their contents may be widely known and circulated. Also, many hon. Members apply to introduce a ten-minute Bill and give details to the press. I can see no objection to that. Such Bills are simply in draft form at that stage, and I take no exception to the practice in this instance.

I must tell the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) that he should have taken all necessary steps to inform his colleague that he was going to raise this matter this afternoon.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It was announced in the Queen's Speech that there was to be a state visit by President Mandela, which I understand is to take place next month. I also understand that it has been announced that he is to address us in a session of both Houses, as is now the convention when a Head of State visits. So far, the venue has not been announced. I appreciate that the responsibility is shared between you and the Lord Chancellor. Is it still possible to make representations about the venue, as many people believe that, given the importance of the visit and the recognition that we want to give President Mandela, it should be Westminster Hall rather than the Royal Gallery?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that any lobbying is necessary, as the House is sensitive to the importance of

the occasion. However, I see that the Leader of the House wishes to say something further to that point of order, which I shall allow him to do.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I was not quite sure of the protocol—I did not know whether it was for you, me, the Lord Chancellor or, indeed, for the Lord Privy Seal to reply. However, if it helps the hon. Gentleman, I can tell him that it is intended—rightly, in my view—that the venue should be Westminster Hall.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation)

HOUSING

That the Rent Officers (Additional Functions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 975) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—[*Mr. Newton.*]

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (Sittings))

That, notwithstanding the Order of the House [29th January] relating to the Scottish Grand Committee, the Chairman shall interrupt the proceedings on Monday 10th June at half-past One o'clock.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

Question agreed to.

Royal Air Force

[*Relevant document: Minutes of Evidence on the Royal Air Force taken before the Defence Committee on 1st May 1996, House of Commons Paper No. 215-ii.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

4.4 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I greatly welcome this opportunity to open our debate on the Royal Air Force on what is a very appropriate day to review its activities and achievements over the past 12 months.

As you, Madam Speaker, will remember, 52 years ago today—6 June 1944—the Royal Air Force was in action over Normandy helping to ensure the extraordinary success of the D-day landings and the ultimate liberation of the occupied countries of western Europe. On D-day itself, the RAF flew more than 5,500 sorties in an allied total of nearly 15,000. The contribution of the allied air forces ensured air supremacy, to such an exceptional effect that the Luftwaffe succeeded in flying fewer than 100 sorties in opposing the landings that day.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): They were great days.

Mr. Soames: They were indeed great days.

The task did not, of course, end with D-day. Throughout the summer of 1944, the RAF continued to make a major contribution to the battle to free Europe. That effort was not made without great sacrifice. Bomber Command alone lost nearly 300 aircraft in June—the vast majority in operations in support of the invasion. Such heroism and determination has inspired, and will continue to inspire, successive generations of young men and women to serve their country with distinction.

Air power today is as important a component of military operations. It exercises an often decisive influence over the broadest spread of operations. In the increasingly unpredictable strategic setting we face, we need forces capable of reacting quickly, boldly and effectively to a broad range of contingencies. The RAF is just such a force. Its speed of deployment, reach and inherent flexibility, and the very punch of air power, ensure that it is ideally positioned to make a formidable contribution to deterrence, or, in the event of conflict, military success.

The House will need no reminder of the key role of air power in the Gulf campaign in ensuring unquestioned mastery and command of the skies, and in greatly degrading the fighting ability of the Iraqi forces. The relatively light casualties—thank God—sustained by coalition ground forces was in no small measure due to that air campaign and its effect. That is, perhaps, the traditional perception of air power and its application. It remains as valid as ever, and we continue to shape our forces to meet the critical demands of high-intensity operations.

It is also clear that air power has great potential in the new scale and scope of the nature of the operations we face. Good examples of that, of course, are low-intensity operations, such as peacekeeping, which require a precise and measured application of force to achieve very specific and clear objectives. There is also a heavy demand for air

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transport—for deployment to the theatre of operations and mobility in the theatre. Helicopters are crucial in the latter respect. Peacekeeping activities often also require sustained operation from deployed and sometimes ill-found positions, imposing strains on people and equipment alike.

In the former Yugoslavia, the RAF has been engaged from the start of the international community's efforts to bring about peace and stability. An RAF Hercules flew the first relief flight into beleaguered Sarajevo, and, appropriately, an RAF Hercules flew in the last relief flight before the siege was finally lifted. Over that airlift's life, the RAF delivered 26,500 tonnes of vital food, medicines and other supplies to the population in nearly 2,000 sorties—some of them extraordinarily hazardous.

In August, when NATO aircraft were ordered into action to deter the Bosnian Serbs from further attacks on UN safe areas, Harrier and Jaguar ground attack aircraft from No. 4 squadron and No. 6 squadron, together with the Royal Navy's Sea Harriers and supported by E3D early warning aircraft, tankers and Tornado F3 air defence aircraft, flew some 270 highly successful bombing missions against Bosnian Serb targets. Of the 19 targets allocated to the Royal Air Force, 16 were destroyed and the remaining three gravely damaged. In addition, the Royal Air Force's information-gathering capability has been vital to the success of allied operations in the former Yugoslavia.

That demonstration of the potency of air power was enough to convince the Bosnian Serb leadership of our capabilities and our intent. It was decisive in bringing peace within the grasp of the international community. When the Dayton accords led to the creation of the NATO peace implementation force—IFOR—the Royal Air Force was again heavily involved in action, transporting about 7,000 troops and 1,750 tonnes of freight, including 500 vehicles from Germany and the United Kingdom.

The Royal Air Force is also doing exceptional work daily over northern and southern Iraq, monitoring compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 688. To date, Royal Air Force combat aircraft and their supporting tankers have flown about 14,500 sorties, amounting to more than 36,000 hours of operations. I was delighted to see something of that effort in October, when I accompanied the Commander-in-Chief, Strike Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten, and visited Incirlik in Southern Turkey and Dhahran in the Gulf, from where operations are mounted. The House should be under no illusion; those are extremely demanding missions, and I was greatly impressed by what I saw and heard.

The quality of support for such deployed operations is extremely important, and I would like to pay a tribute to the Tactical Supply Wing, which provides supply and specialised aircraft refuelling services to national, NATO and UN forces, and to the Tactical Communications Wing, which provides support communications in the Gulf, Turkey and former Yugoslavia. Personnel from those two very specialist units spend much time away from home, carrying out those vital, but obviously often unseen, tasks. They do not get enough credit for the hard work they do, and I am especially pleased to mark them out for special recognition today.

Even more than in the past, we now perceive United Kingdom forces as required to operate on a joint basis, with land, sea and air elements integrated within a single command structure. The House will recall that we have introduced new structures to improve our ability to respond rapidly and cohesively, with force elements drawn from all three services, notably the permanent joint headquarters—PJHQ—at Northwood, and the joint rapid deployment force.

Responsibility for joint exercises, for existing operations such as those in Bosnia and the middle east, and for new operations overseas, will be transferred to permanent joint headquarters over the coming months. Air power will provide a key component within the joint forces, which we can expect permanent joint headquarters to command.

In addition to the heavy involvement in operations that I have already highlighted, the Royal Air Force has over the past year been actively involved in training and collaboration with our allies, both old and new. Air and ground crews have only recently returned from the United States where they took part in Exercise Purple Star, the first exercise involving the permanent joint headquarters.

The exercise was the largest combined United Kingdom/United States deployment since the Gulf war. It involved 12,000 personnel from the United Kingdom, including elements of the joint rapid deployment force, and 45,000 from the United States. A total— *[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) like to intervene?

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I merely said, "In some very dodgy foreign ships."

Mr. Soames: What an inspired intervention It has added a great deal of light to our deliberations. Perhaps I may continue.

There were 45,000 American troops involved, and a total of 56 Royal Air Force aircraft took part, including Harrier GR7s and Tornado GR1s, VC10 tankers, Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft and Hercules C130s, which were engaged in the largest parachute drop since the second world war, involving more than 5,000 United States and British paratroopers.

Eight Royal Air Force Pumas and seven Chinooks participated in a variety of support helicopter operations, including comprehensive cross-training with the United States 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force and 18th Airborne Corps. Two Royal Air Force Sea King search and rescue aircraft from 202 Squadron participated for the first time in a major exercise in the combat search and rescue role. The airlift to the United States involved some 2,550 hours of flying by aircraft of the air transport fleet. The exercise, which was on a gigantic scale, was a tremendous success. It provided fantastic training opportunities for all air and ground crews.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady will have heard about it from her constituents. The exercise provided training for maritime strike and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, and for Tornado and Harrier aircraft in support of their offensive counter-air, battlefield air interdiction and

close-air support roles. Many lessons have been learned about large-scale combined joint operations and these will be incorporated in future tasks.

Many exercises, of course, are on a rather smaller scale. As we debate today, RAF Jaguars and Harriers, supported by VC10 and Tristar aircraft, are in Alaska to participate in the Cope Thunder exercise series with US and Canadian forces. They will practise operational low flying, weapons firing and electronic warfare procedures.

The RAF has participated in nine major NATO exercises within Europe in the past 12 months, including deployments to Germany, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Norway. UK participation in such exercises demonstrates our tangible support for the alliance. It affords valuable practice in combined training, while operating alongside forces of other nations in an often unfamiliar environment. It allows the RAF to practise and assess the deployment, sustainment and recovery of our reaction forces declared to NATO.

Collaboration with our allies has also continued within the Western European Union. In particular, the Franco-British European Air Group, announced at the Chartres summit in the autumn of 1994, became operational during the past year. The air group, based at RAF High Wycombe, was formally inaugurated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Chirac on 30 October 1995.

The group, which aims to improve the capabilities of our respective air forces to carry out combined operations in pursuit of shared interests, has only a small permanent planning staff and has made excellent progress. It is showing tangible results in increased combined training and personnel exchanges, and work is progressing on contingency planning for joint humanitarian operations. We indicated that, after a settling-in period of at least a year, the group might expand to include other WEU nations. We will soon be considering further the possibilities of such an expansion.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister refers to our co-operation with France. Will he devote some time to the implications of President Chirac's announcement about the future large aircraft, which could be serious for the RAF? Will the Air Force have to look elsewhere for an even larger heavy lift capacity?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman knows that these difficult and complex matters are dealt with by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement—the brains sitting to my left. My hon. Friend will refer to that matter later. [HON. MEMBERS: "Does he mean the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin)?"] The answer is that both my hon. Friends know more about it than I do.

In November, three Hercules aircraft participated in Exercise Bright Star in Egypt, operating alongside contingents from France, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft have been deployed to the Gulf for joint exercises; to Malaysia to participate in the five power defence arrangement exercise Starfish; to South Africa and, most recently, to New Zealand, where two Nimrods have been training alongside anti-submarine warfare forces from New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Finally, a Nimrod and crew from 120 Squadron have just completed co-operative training with the joint international task force east in the Caribbean.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): My hon. Friend referred to Nimrods, which are due to be phased out in the near future. Will he confirm that there will be an early announcement—hopefully, before the House rises—on whether the Government intend to order replacements for Nimrod or to update it? Will he confirm that the MOD will look at the life expectancy and value of any replacement, and that he will consider the total British components of any replacement?

Mr. Soames: I can confirm none of those things, because, as I have said, I only use the equipment when it has been bought. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has those difficult decisions ahead of him, and I have no doubt that he will wish to turn to that important and expensive procurement in his extensive and already brilliant speech.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the Minister ask the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to look carefully at the Valkyrie when he visits my constituency, especially Marshall's, tomorrow? The Valkyrie has been developed with a view to replacing the Nimrod as the maritime patrol aircraft, and it has the lowest cost, the best export potential and a high content of United Kingdom production.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady is a formidable ambassador for the Valkyrie. I have studied her during the debate. She has looked like a wise owl on her Bench, and I knew that she was pregnant with question. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will have heard what she said and will pay attention to the excellent opportunities that Marshall's have at present and will have in the future.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Soames: Oh my God!

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister seems to be concerned by interventions from women. The replacement of Nimrod is critical, because many small and large businesses may be involved in the result of the decision. Can the Minister give us any information about when the decision will be taken and announced?

Mr. Soames: I am doing my best to explain to the House that I am here to speak this afternoon about the operational matters of the Royal Air Force. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will, I am sure, address such questions. I do not wish to make light of the matter, not only because those aircraft are important to the overall operations of the RAF and the defence interests of the United Kingdom, but because the programme carries many commercial implications, as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said. I know that the decision will be taken with great care.

The RAF contributes both to NATO's partnership for peace initiative and to the United Kingdom's outreach programme. Last October, Tornado F3s took part in the first ever partnership for peace flying exercise,

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Co-operative Jaguar, which was held in Denmark. Those exercises, together with the essential preparatory work on flight safety, language proficiency and effective airspace management, are excellent opportunities to reap the benefits of co-operative training, as well as to build confidence and familiarity with potential allies.

The past year has seen a great expansion in bilateral contacts with the countries of central and eastern Europe under the outreach programme, many of which form the basis for successful participation in partnership for peace. It is a testament to the extraordinarily high standards and professionalism of the RAF that we receive daily requests for advice from countries in central and eastern Europe, covering topics from flight safety and airspace management to aviation medicine. The Chief of the Air Staff plans to visit his counterparts in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary later this year, and I greatly enjoyed the discussions that I had with the Hungarian Chief of the Air Staff a few weeks ago.

The RAF has also been active in providing assistance to the civil community both at home and abroad. Last year, RAF Hercules aircraft carried humanitarian aid to the dependent territory of Montserrat and neighbouring Antigua to help set up evacuation centres and to airlift those local people who chose to leave the island. With the volcanic activity continuing in Montserrat and elsewhere, the RAF stands by to provide whatever further assistance may be required.

Closer to home, personnel from RAF fire rescue teams, who usually provide crash cover at RAF airfields, were deployed to Merseyside, where they helped to provide emergency fire service cover during the industrial dispute. The RAF is ready to provide similar assistance elsewhere if required. Earlier this year, when bad weather isolated many parts of the country, helicopters took emergency supplies to villages that had been cut off, and ferried people with emergency medical conditions to hospital.

The yellow helicopters of the search and rescue teams continue to be a welcome sight to many an imperilled or incompetent yachtsman or stranded mountaineer. Although established to rescue downed military airmen, the RAF's search and rescue fleet, stationed at eight different locations around the country as well as in Cyprus and the Falkland islands, also provides assistance to the civil community. With the mountain rescue teams, the search and rescue teams were responsible for saving more than 1500 lives during 1995.

By July, the last remaining Wessex helicopters on front-line squadrons will be replaced with the much more capable Sea King, which will increase still further the RAF's ability to help the civil community.

A rather less eye-catching, although nonetheless essential, service to the civil community is air traffic control. My Department co-operates closely with the civil authorities in providing air navigation services to all aircraft in United Kingdom airspace. Last year, some 230,000 military and 82,000 civil flights were provided with air navigation services by military air traffic controllers. In addition, 1,400,000 flights were provided with ATC services at military airfields. The close co-operation between military and civil air traffic controllers is truly essential to the maintenance of this country's safe, efficient and effective air traffic control arrangements .

In Northern Ireland, the RAF continues to fulfil an important role in the support provided by our armed forces to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. At present, approximately 1,100 RAF personnel are deployed in the Province, operating Chinook, Wessex and Puma helicopters, and an RAF field squadron, which provides security at RAF Aldergrove, the Province's main military airhead.

As in the rest of the United Kingdom, the RAF also provides invaluable assistance to the wider Northern Irish community in times of emergency. RAF aircraft have often been called out to help rescue people, either at sea or on Northern Ireland's inland lakes, or to airlift the injured to hospital. The RAF will, like the other two services, continue to assist the police in countering terrorism until all terrorist organisations make a commitment to end violence permanently.

Before I leave the subject of operational activities, the House would, I know, wish me to say something about the recent spate of aircraft accidents, which has seen the unfortunate loss so far this year of nine RAF aircraft. Flight safety is a fundamental part of operational effectiveness. While there has been understandable concern about the recent spate of accidents, there has also been much unfounded, and some wholly irresponsible, speculation about their potential causes.

There have been suggestions that those accidents are connected with the reduction in the size of the RAF following the end of the cold war. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reductions in the number of aircraft and personnel have been carefully planned, and they are consistent with the RAF's commitments. They do not—nor would they ever be allowed to—compromise either RAF training or safety.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Does not the incorporation of the prestigious, and hitherto separate, Queen's flight, no less, into an existing RAF squadron—32 Communications Squadron at RAF Northolt in my constituency—demonstrate the high level of flight safety that the service maintains? If RAF Northolt were required to become a civil airport and a satellite of Heathrow, as the Select Committee on Transport proposes, would that not be incompatible with its royal duty, and its communications role in flying Ministers and senior offices—roles which are important, in both peace and war?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who rightly wishes to raise an important matter. I confirm that no decisions have been taken on the recommendations in the report of the Select Committee on Transport on airport capacity. I reaffirm to my hon. Friend the Ministry of Defence's continuing requirement to fulfil its core tasks through the use of the facilities at RAF Northolt. My Department currently has no plans to change either the status of the station or the nature of its operation.

I was saying that it would be folly to compromise either training or safety, and we would never countenance it. It is arrant nonsense to suggest that we would do anything to jeopardise the safety of aircrew by allowing an unserviceable aircraft to fly. No aircraft is permitted to leave the ground unless it is judged entirely safe to do so. The ground crews that service RAF aircraft are dedicated professionals, and are amongst the best in the world.

At the same time, the RAF continues to maintain the most rigorous training standards, which every other country in the world wishes to come and learn from. Average fast jet flying hours are well above minimum NATO levels. Operating levels and skills remain at an exceptionally high standard.

There is no reason to believe that there is any fundamental problem in the way in which operations are conducted or supported, or that this is anything other than a truly, deeply and very unfortunate coincidence. It would be premature to infer that the overall accident rate for 1996 will reveal any new or disturbing trend. There have been similar clusters of accidents in the past, but they did not reveal any new trend. Overall, the general accident rate has continued to decline since the early 1980s.

I assure the House, nevertheless, that there really is no complacency. As the House will know, boards of inquiry are set up to examine the circumstances of each crash. Those investigations are extremely thorough and exhaustive, and although the work is still in progress, I can tell the House that there is no definite pattern to link any of these accidents.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Those who put about the scaremongering stories should be reminded that one should look at the number of accidents per 10,000 flying hours rather than just the number of accidents, because in the 1950s we had hundreds of accidents—and I mean hundreds—in a year. In one year, 1956, there were 156 aircraft accidents, of which more than 100 were Hunters and Meteors. Again, those accidents had to be measured against 10,000 flying hours. The RAF operates the finest and safest military operation anywhere.

Mr. Soames: Plainly, as I said at the beginning, much of the comment on these accidents has been extremely ill informed, and on one or two occasions comments from the Labour party have been downright irresponsible.

The RAF is and always has been a forward-thinking operation. I have spoken of its achievements and activities over the past year, but the House will also wish to hear of the heart and spirit of the service, and how they are being sustained through a period of profound structural change and reorientation.

In last year's debate on the Royal Air Force, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), who was then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, explained the effects of rationalisation and restructuring following the "Front Line First" and "Competing for Quality" initiatives. The RAF is now well on its way to completing these processes of change, and although clearly it has been an unsettling and worrying time, it is greatly to the credit of all RAF personnel that they have accommodated these changes while continuing to do their jobs in the excellent way we have all come to expect.

One of the most painful aspects of the changes has been that the RAF of the future will undoubtedly require fewer people. In 1990, the RAF's trained uniformed strength was 83,500 people; today, it is 62,500. By April 1999, it is planned to be 52,200. Sadly, 8,300 redundancies have been necessary over the past and current financial years, although fewer than 1,000 have been compulsory.

I can assure the House that the redundancy programme is being very carefully and sympathetically managed to ensure that the RAF retains the best mix of skills and abilities to meet its future commitments. The needs of those who are being made redundant are also being given high priority. People chosen for redundancy are given every assistance to prepare themselves for life as civilians, including retraining and careers advice. I am glad to say that we do not expect to need any further redundancies to meet our current manpower targets.

Mrs. Ewing: All hon. Members with RAF bases in our constituencies are concerned about these issues. Will the Minister give further evidence, perhaps in a written answer or information placed in the Library, as to how this will impact on particular bases, because in my area, at RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth, people just do not know what will happen to them. That causes a great deal of uncertainty, not just for them but for their families and for the local economy. Will he give us further information beyond that which appears in the 1996 defence estimates?

Mr. Soames: I will see what I can do for the hon. Lady. I thank her for the great support that she has always given the Royal Air Force. I think she will find that, in the bases to which she referred—indeed, in all the bases of the RAF—everyone knows what their future is following the announcements made in early March. I do not know whether I will be able to give her the figures she requires, but I will try to give her a note to that end.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for keeping in close touch with me over recent months about the closure of Stanmore Park and the plans arising from that. I ask him to keep up that excellent record. I thank him for the close consultations that we have maintained. Will he now keep in touch with me about the projected changes, bearing in mind that he wants to avoid compulsory redundancies and we want to maximise the redeployment effort?

Mr. Soames: I was grateful to my hon. Friend for taking the trouble to see me to ensure that we were carrying out the restructuring operations in the correct way. I assure him that we will keep in touch with him about the restructuring that is taking place in his constituency.

The Government recognise that morale is extraordinarily vulnerable during a period of restructuring and redundancy. The higher command of the Royal Air Force deserves a great deal more credit that it gets for piloting the service so successfully through what has been an extraordinarily difficult time. I utterly reject the criticisms that have been voiced that the Royal Air Force is a demoralised force, lacking direction and feeling, abandoned by its military and political masters. That is a gross and unfair distortion.

It is true that the Royal Air Force has experienced a great deal of turbulence, and it has, like the other two services, had to get to grips with profound change. However, it is also true that it is a force of immense professionalism, which has responded in a good spirit to the challenges it has faced. There is no evidence to link any change in working practices with a degradation in skills in the air or on the ground.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): A few moments ago, the Minister said that the Royal Air Force was a forward-looking body. Will he learn from

[Mr. William Ross]

experience? Does he remember that, during the Gulf war, we lost a number of aircraft because they had to overfly the airfields that they were attacking? Will he give us an assurance that he will look carefully at the provision of stand-off weaponry for the future?

If he does that, will he look carefully at the team put together by Shorts for the stand-off weapons programme, which includes British Aerospace, British Aerospace Systems and Equipment, Royal Ordnance, Lucas Aerospace and MSA in Scotland? We believe that it creates a unique opportunity for us to tie in the skills that are being developed in the United States in relation to its stand-off equipment and for the United Kingdom to reap a considerable transfer of technology and high-quality jobs.

Mr. Soames: That was a formidable intervention from the hon. Member. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only thing that can gladden your heart and cause your spirits to rise is that it means that he will not have to make a real speech during the debate. I have tried to persuade the hon. Gentleman that these are matters for my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, and I am sure that he will deal with them.

I correct the hon. Gentleman on one point: the aircraft losses during the Gulf war occurred because the Royal Air Force was charged with dropping munitions of a certain type, which caused it to have to undertake the most dangerous and difficult missions—during which, very sadly, a number of aircraft were lost. They were not lost because they did not have the weapons to do the business; they were lost because they were delivering the weapon of the moment, which required them to be positioned right over the runway.

Our main concern, of course, must be to ensure the health and fighting efficiency of the service. We have an active recruiting campaign, and training that is among the best in the country. These are not hollow words. I saw some excellent training under way when I visited RAF Cranwell, RAF Honington and RAF Shawbury recently.

The Government have announced a number of important decisions on equipment procurement and upgrading—a matter that my hon. Friend will deal with at much greater length later—which is a measure of our firm support for the Royal Air Force and our determination to maintain its position in the premier league. We continue, and will continue, to drive down overheads through rationalisation and restructuring. We are making use of competition from the private sector in the delivery of support services—as is every other air force in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. As part of the search for greater efficiency, we shall continue with this search for savings. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will have more to say about that when he replies to the debate.

However, I am pleased to announce that, following a competition, a five-year contract has been placed with Brown and Root and Marshall Aerospace Ltd.—BRAMA—to provide support services at Royal Air Force Valley, including Hawk aircraft maintenance. After an extended implementation period, this contract will come into effect on 31 March 1997. It will result in savings of £25 million during the contract period, and will provide 400 new civilian jobs at the station—a welcome boost to the Anglesey area.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I thank the Minister for that announcement, and for his co-operation and courtesy during the time that we have been discussing the issue with him. Now that he has been able to make the announcement that BRAMA has secured the contract, can he confirm, first, that it is aware of the requirements—of which it has been informed informally by ourselves and others—to ensure that the maximum number of local people are employed at Valley in the 400 jobs announced, and, secondly, that it will co-operate with the agencies and the Welsh Office to ensure that, where those skills are not currently available, training programmes will be put into place and it will co-operate with us?

Mr. Soames: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words, for representing so clearly the views of his constituents and for being so positive at what has been a difficult time. I am happy to give him the assurances he seeks. I know that the consortium has been closely in touch with all the agencies concerned, and I believe that obviously this will be an astonishing success and will bring great benefit to Anglesey and the wider area. I know that it will be welcome news to local people who were worried about the future of the station.

The terms of the contract ensure that the very high standards set by the Royal Air Force for the provision of support services will continue when BRAMA take over. To that end, BRAMA intends to set up training arrangements to equip personnel with the necessary skills and to establish a long-term training programme to provide individual development and continuity of supply of qualified personnel. Initial discussions with the local training and enterprise council and college regarding provision of training began during the tendering process, and will now be pursued further.

Mr. Spellar: Does the provision with regard to training apply only to upgrading skills of existing trained personnel, or is there provision for apprentice training to ensure a continuing throughput of skilled personnel?

Mr. Soames: I am not able to answer that question, but I will happily let the hon. Gentleman have a detailed note later.

Following the implementation of this contract, Royal Air Force Valley will still employ more than 300 Royal Air Force personnel. I am fully confident that they will, in partnership with BRAMA, continue to deliver advanced fast jet training to the high standards for which they rightly have a fantastic reputation.

We are pressing ahead with the work following on from Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the armed forces' manpower, career and remuneration structures. Good progress is being made. I emphasise again that this is not a savings exercise. Rather, it will lead to better structures and better management of our people. I hope to make a further and more detailed announcement on this subject later in the summer.

Changes following "Front Line First" have highlighted the vital role performed by our reserve forces, and we have been looking closely at how we can make better use

of the tremendous enthusiasm and great array of skills that people bring to the Reserves. As I announced on Third Reading of the Reserve Forces Bill on 20 May, we have now decided to form a Royal Auxiliary Air Force support helicopter squadron at RAF Benson in October. I hope that this will prove an innovative concept for the wider use of reserves, and I hope to give the House further details later in the year.

Before leaving the subject of reserves, I mention in particular the members of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve currently called out for service in the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. I have seen the exceptional service and support they give to our regular forces in the provision of intelligence, photographic interpretation and meteorological forecasts. We are extremely fortunate to have such high-quality people on the reserve list.

The Royal Air Force is emerging from a period of great change. This process has inevitably imposed strains and tensions on individuals and the organisation alike. It says a lot for both that these changes have been carried through in a period of exceptional operational activity. I am extremely conscious that we all owe them a debt of gratitude.

I am very proud of the Royal Air Force. It is equipped with modern, capable aircraft, and manned by professional, extraordinarily skilled and dedicated people. It enjoys a superb reputation at home and abroad, and anyone who has the honour to travel in the name of the United Kingdom on defence business knows that that is no idle boast. It is one of this country's great assets, and we intend to ensure that the means are made available to retain and enhance that asset for the future.

4.44 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I thank the Minister for a comprehensive report on the current operations of the RAF. I convey to the House the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the shadow Defence Secretary, who is today out in Bosnia, meeting our troops, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who is in Camberley, meeting other troops.

I am sure that we were all shocked this afternoon by reports in the evening paper that the beating retreat ceremony in Horse Guards parade was disrupted by a raucous party of hooray Henrys in the Office of the Secretary of State. I am sure that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces deplores that as much as the rest of us, and I was slightly surprised that he did not take the opportunity, on behalf of the Department, to issue an apology for those unfortunate events.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): Would it not be appropriate to ask Mr. Terry Venables to investigate and to conclude that the doctrine of collective responsibility should apply?

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Offside!

Mr. Spellar: Or, in line with certain civilian air companies, that perhaps handcuffs should be provided for the occasion.

This is the third and last of the services debates in this Session. Like others, it provides a fitting opportunity for the House to pay tribute to the illustrious history and valued current role of our troops. Since the last RAF debate in the House, we have had the 50th anniversary of VJ day, which was so memorably and dramatically highlighted by the Lancaster bomber dropping a million poppies. Recently, we have had a tremendous display of Spitfires, reminding us of another epic period in the last war.

As the Minister mentioned, by chance or good parliamentary management, today's debate is on the anniversary of D-day, when the domination of the air by the allied forces played such a considerable part in the success of that operation. Those events reminded us graphically of the key front-line role played by the RAF in the defence of these islands and our liberties.

As the Minister said, the RAF is still very much in the front line. In former Yugoslavia, it has played a full part in the campaign to restrain the Bosnian Serbs, in a variety of roles including successful bombing missions, combat air patrol and reconnaissance missions. For four years it has been part of the longest humanitarian airlift in history. That humanitarian role has been to the fore again in the continuing flights from our base in Turkey over northern Iraq as well as flights over southern Iraq.

Closer to home, as the Minister said, the RAF has played a valuable role in Northern Ireland, and we all hope that the current talks and engagements in the political process will lead towards a normalisation of the position. We must not take too much for granted and, as the Minister said, must maintain our preparedness.

This year also marked a major break in a long tradition when it was announced that the Tornado squadrons at RAF Bruggen were being redeployed to existing operational bases in the United Kingdom. We all recognise the logic behind that decision, but we should also take the opportunity of paying tribute to the vital role they played in maintaining the peace during the long era of the cold war.

We should also use the opportunity of this debate to pay tribute to the work of the Reserves, which was covered in much more detail during the extensive debates on the Reserve Forces Bill.

The Minister mentioned, and undoubtedly other hon. Members will also discuss, the considerable concern that has been expressed at the spate of crashes earlier in the year, with the loss not only of aeroplanes but of human life. Thankfully, that appears to have abated slightly, but we all recognise that any service can have a run of bad luck. The RAF had a similar spate in 1994. I understand that the United States navy has recently had a similar experience with Phantoms. There will be individual inquiries into the crashes and no one would want to pre-judge their outcomes. However, we are asking for a broader inquiry in order to consider the crashes collectively and see whether there are any common factors and any lessons to be learnt.

We must ask whether aircraft availability and the cost of flying are restricting pilot training. When I asked the Minister on 12 March what was the current average period for completion of fast jet training, I received the astonishing reply that it was 259 weeks and that that would be reduced to 109 weeks by the end of the year. When my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields asked on 25 March about the average air crew training hours for Tornado aircraft, he was told that the monthly average for 1991-92 was 17 hours 45 minutes and that that had been reduced to 13 hours 55 minutes in 1995-96.

[Mr. Spellar]

I do not pretend to be an expert on pilot skills. There are those in the Royal Air Force—and indeed some in this place—who are better qualified to make an informed judgment in that regard.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman. The difference results from the fact that, in the last year that he mentioned, there was more operational flying and less training. In the first two years that he mentioned, there was less operational flying and more training.

Mr. Spellar: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the Royal Air Force is determined to retrieve those training hours precisely because it perceives the difference between training experience that is aimed at particular tasks and skills and operational experience. There is concern that the disparity should be redressed, and the RAF's appearance before the Defence Committee last month reinforces that point. I believe that the Select Committee was correct to press the RAF about the issue, and we await the outcome of its deliberations.

Mr. Soames: I must clarify that point. Is the hon. Gentleman calling for another review over and above the individual crash inquiries, which obviously do the same thing as would an overall review?

Mr. Spellar: I hoped that I had made it clear, but I am happy to reinforce that point. I said earlier that proper, individual inquiries are conducted into each crash. We are asking for a broad review that examines features common to those crashes rather than simply looking at each case in isolation. We ask the Minister to undertake that review to see whether there are common faults and lessons to be learnt. I hope that I have clarified my request.

I hope also that the Ministry of Defence will look more critically at contracting out training. We would be alarmed at the prospect of extending civilian training schemes to fast jet pilots. Even in areas of greater compatibility, we should be concerned about eroding the RAF training base. The RAF cannot be simply a project manager: it must have strength in depth and retain an all-round competence. It is important that the RAF provides a proper career structure for its personnel while delivering continuity and security.

The same considerations apply to the maintenance side of the RAF in logistics command and the many skilled civilian staff. We are concerned about the retention of trained personnel in these rather turbulent times to which the Minister referred. For example, 11 out of 12 Tornado flight commanders in Germany intend to exercise their option to retire early at the age of 38. It is from that officer pool that the future station and squadron commanders are drawn. Perhaps the Minister will say what measures the Government intend to take to correct that worrying problem.

In spite of the Minister's bluster on such occasions—we all accept that the Minister in full bluster is quite an impressive sight—the fact remains that people inside and outside the forces cannot understand why billions of pounds are spent on redundancy, including compulsory redundancy, while hundreds of millions of pounds are spent on recruitment and the armed forces remain undermanned. Only last week I received a letter from a man who asked why his son was to be made compulsorily redundant from the RAF next year while it continued to advertise for new trainees.

That is not only a great waste of training and experience—I am not sure whether those factors carry much weight with the Government—but the worst possible advertisement for new recruits. When major international companies such as the Rover Group—which announced its profits today—proudly proclaim their job-for-life concept, does the Minister believe that the RAF, with its hire-and-fire mentality, will be able to compete for the best recruits? That is a real problem for the RAF.

Mr. Soames: Although the hon. Gentleman has extremely limited experience in such matters, he should realise that the services have never been job-for-life organisations. The question of recruiting balance and structure is a matter for the Royal Air Force. It must decide what staff age profile it wants and needs. It must constantly refresh its staff and bring in new and younger blood at all levels and in all ranks. Finally, we cannot compel people to join the Royal Air Force, the Army or the Navy. Therefore, we must spend a great deal of time, money and effort ensuring that we get our message across.

Mr. Spellar: I thank the Minister. I am not entirely sure how long he served in the armed forces. Perhaps he will tell us whether he served as long as Lord Craig, who expressed concern yesterday in another place about flight commanders. The Minister should move away from cheap personal abuse and answer properly the questions that are asked not only by the Opposition but by many in the forces and by their families. They are extremely concerned about the uncertainty of careers in the forces and they are not impressed by the large-scale handing out of compulsory redundancies.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman is correct to refer to the views of Lord Craig, who has considerable experience in that area. He will know from his own service that flight commanders of that age often leave the forces in order to enter the civilian field and earn large salaries working as captains for major airlines. We must recognise that the reduced size of the Royal Air Force means limited opportunities for flight commanders to become station commanders and air chief marshals.

Mr. Spellar: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I think that he would accept that 11 out of 12 is a high proportion.

The Government do not seem to have time for continuity and competence in maintenance. How else can one explain the decision to contract out the Tornado repair work at RAF St. Athan, whatever the cost? Hon. Members have questioned the Minister about that matter, but he will not come clean about how much damage was done and what the final bill will be. Perhaps the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who knows more about such things, will expand on that issue when he replies to the debate. If he does, we shall be able to evaluate the effect of that decision on the alleged savings to be derived from contracting out.

The Government are also considering contracting out maintenance work elsewhere in Wales at RAF Sealand and RAF Valley. The Minister made an announcement to

that effect this afternoon. However, he did not answer the question that I put to him regarding longer-term training and apprentice training. Contractors will be able to use redundant RAF personnel to fulfil the contracts and they will be able to bid on that basis. If we are to retain long-term competence through the contracting route, the real question is what training efforts will be made to ensure that we have the skills in this country.

That is the difficulty that the Minister faces, and we must continue to press the Government on that point. When we asked whether contracts would include the requirement to ensure proper training, we received no reply. There has been mention of additional funding to the local training and enterprise council to provide conversion training. That is most welcome, but we still need to look to future competence.

The danger is that such measures could lead to a hollowing out of the logistical capability of the RAF. We are concerned about the potential weakening of our surge capability, particularly if we became involved in two theatres of operation at the same time. We are also concerned about the reduction in the RAF's benchmarking ability, which enables the proper evaluation of bids for contracted work. We firmly believe that any decisions on contracting work must be determined by pragmatism not dogmatism and we shall impose a moratorium on new contracts while we evaluate the schemes that are currently in the pipeline.

In that context, I shall move on to the story of the sale of the married quarters estate—a quite extraordinary saga that is drawing increasing public attention. Frankly, there have been some problems with the estate over the years, particularly with the high number of voids for long periods and the condition of some of the properties—mainly Army properties, but to a lesser extent in the Navy.

It was sensible and pragmatic to examine the forces' long-term requirements and to consider whether all the properties involved were suitable and whether, due to their location or for other reasons, some were surplus to requirements. That process seems to be continuing separately from the overall sale. However, the main sale of the married quarters estate does not appear to be driven by any of those considerations or by anything other than a desperate attempt to fill the Treasury coffers for a pre-election giveaway. It is a "live now, pay later" deal. The Chancellor of the Exchequer will be living it up and the service men and women and their families will be paying—not only in money, but in the loss of mutual support between families in the service community.

The purpose of the scheme cannot be to introduce private sector skills because the management of the estate will continue to be carried out by the defence housing executive, as will the repairs. Only this week *The Times* carried a substantial advert for positions in the defence housing executive to deal with the management of the estate. The problem has been identified as follows by one of the losing bidders, Johnson Fry:

"If this is viewed as a purely financial transaction then problems will emerge if there is not serious housing management experience in the team".

The only housing management side seems to be with the defence housing executive.

Nor can the scheme benefit the troops of all services. Under the current review, they are faced with rent increases between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent. this year alone, with worse to come as they move up towards market rents. As the MOD pays market rents to the new landlords, there will be increasing pressure to make up the deficit. Individual service men and their families will be paying for that and financing this dubious deal.

We should also recall that service personnel will have lost their rights to the discounted sales scheme that was of considerable benefit to those leaving the service. They are also concerned that the better-quality property—much of which is with the RAF—will be sold and service personnel will be moved into the less desirable properties. Some hon. Members may wish to draw attention to that during the debate.

Nor can it be to the benefit of the services in general. I mentioned earlier the return of Tornados from RAF Bruggen, and the services are obviously considering the return of other units. The sales may close that option. Perhaps that is why the sale is not only unpopular with the service men and families, as was shown by the recent evidence of the Army wives to the Select Committee, but of concern among those in the higher ranks of the forces who are planning for the future.

Looking to the future, will the Minister tell us what will happen after 25 years? According to the prospectus:

"At the end of the 25 year period MOD will be able to renew its leases, subject to a specified right for the landlord to obtain vacant possession for redevelopment or on provision of comparable"—

that is an interesting word—

"alternative accommodation."

Where will that leave the MOD and individual service men and women and their families? What certainty does it give them? That is also why it caused such uproar in the other place earlier this week when peers from all parties expressed serious concerns and reservations about the scheme.

What is the driving force behind the sale? It is fair to say that in some of the press publicity some chaff has been dropped to suggest that it is to pay for repairs. If that is the case, perhaps the Minister can say in his reply that the total proceeds of the sale will be devoted to upgrading service houses over and above current expenditure. That seems to be causing some humour in the ranks, so I presume it is not the answer. If he cannot say that, will he tell us what percentage of the money made from the sales will be spent on upgrading the properties? Perhaps he would like to intervene now.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): This is such drivel that it is hardly worth intervening. If the hon. Gentleman were not in a position of supporting the sale, would he find the money to upgrade the properties which need upgrading from somewhere else? In other words, will he commit himself now to spending more on the defence budget?

Mr. Spellar: When Ministers are slightly short on argument, they resort to personal abuse.

Mr. Soames: Certainly not.

Mr. Spellar: "Drivel" seems to me to fall into that category. It is interesting to note that, although the Minister put up a smokescreen, he did not answer my

[Mr. Spellar]

question. I shall answer his question, but I would be interested in an answer to mine. What percentage of the overall sale will be spent on upgrading the property?

Mr. Arbuthnot: As the hon. Gentleman should be aware, it is not possible to know what percentage of the overall sale proceeds will be spent on the property because we do not yet know what the sale price will be. As I told the Select Committee yesterday, the defence housing executive has estimated that it will cost £100 million to upgrade the property to grade 1 standard. Therefore, the overall sale expectations will be more than the defence housing executive could possibly spend on any property. That was why I described the hon. Gentleman's remarks as drivel.

Mr. Spellar: I thank the Minister for that reply. That figure makes it quite clear that the money that could be released by the sale of surplus properties—much of which is taking place at the moment—could easily cover the cost of repairs. Therefore, the overall sale is unnecessary because repairs could be paid for at the margin. That gives us a clue as to the real business of the sale.

Mr. Arbuthnot: How would the hon. Gentleman pay for it?

Mr. Spellar: There is a problem of communication here.

The MOD has already given instructions for the sale of a number of surplus properties. Undoubtedly, more properties will be declared surplus to requirement. The proceeds would go a considerable way towards paying for the repairs. I said earlier that we accepted the need for the sale of surplus properties. If the Minister believes that the sale of surplus properties will not raise sufficient funds, perhaps, instead of hiding behind commercial confidentiality, he will tell us how much was raised from the sale of surplus properties. However, the number of properties being sold suggests that the MOD might not be getting a very good deal if it had not managed to raise £100 million.

Mr. Frank Cook: It might help my hon. Friend if I were to inform him that—as I understand it—11,000 voids are available. If they were sold for £10,000 each, which is not a great deal at today's market values, that would raise £110 million, perhaps allowing an extra £10 million for the Conservative party election fund.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend has put some figures on that, but I would not want to give the Government ideas, as we wish to retain some flexibility within the system. Certainly my hon. Friend has clearly identified that the sale of surplus properties would be sufficient to pay for the rolling programme of repairs.

Let us get down to the real reason for the sale. Its handling gives us a clue. Why did the Secretary of State make a surprise announcement in November and why, with Christmas and the new year intervening, did he require replies by 25 January? That seems an extremely short period. How could one seriously expect considered replies on such a complex project over that period? The sale comprises 60,000 properties over 800 sites. Who would have the resources to evaluate it in that time?

The sale of individual properties is a sweetener, but the real attraction for any bidder is rent payments. The prospectus talks of a guaranteed payment or aggregated market rents, whichever is the higher, and we know what the Government have been doing to market rents. It appears, however, that even that is not enough. Reports in the *Financial Times* show that the MOD has been asked to consider index-linked payments. And the reason? It is believed that that will enable it to raise the upfront price.

So there we have it in a nutshell. This is not a proper privatisation or a service agreement using private sector skills. There is not even any competing for quality. It is a straightforward sale and lease-back scheme. If it were happening in a company, we would immediately conclude, unless there was a proper reinvestment strategy, that it had cash flow problems. It is a live now, pay later, deal.

I gather that the Minister seemed reluctant yesterday at the meeting of the Select Committee to say who was buying, which is surprising as it has been in nearly every business section of the quality press in the past couple of weeks. It informs us—who knows if it is right, but I suspect that it might be close to the truth—that Nomura bank, Morgan Stanley, Lehman Brothers and ING are buying. A couple of weeks ago, another Secretary of State created considerable fuss about flying the European flag over public buildings for a day. Now, without a murmur from those Ministers, the stars and stripes or the rising sun will be flying over our married quarters estates, airfields, camps and naval bases. It is an extraordinary and disgraceful situation. A previous Tory Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, talked about selling the family silver. This lot are taking out a second mortgage on the house.

Some procurement decisions need to be mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) drew attention to the future large aircraft project, which I know is of considerable concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). We are receiving confusing messages from across the channel. We and the aircraft industry hope that the Minister can shed some light on the subject, especially the French Government's attitude on development and production of the aircraft, and on their intention to purchase.

I am sure that the Minister heard last week that Volker Rühe, the German Defence Minister, was speaking encouragingly about the FLA's development. We have also noticed heavy advertising in the defence press from German industry about the FLA. I hope that the Minister will give us further encouragement on that important project and on working more closely generally with the French air force and industry, which is to be welcomed.

We all recognise that, after some difficulties, Eurofighter 2000 is increasingly emerging as a success story, especially in terms of its capabilities. It is a tribute to British and to European industry, but the Government can also take some credit, not only over the work-share issue, but over the partnership with industry.

Since taking on this portfolio and more recently on a visit to Warton, I have been impressed by the substantial co-operation and collaboration between the RAF and equipment manufacturers at all stages. The result seems to be an extremely pilot-friendly aircraft. The Government should be claiming more credit for their role, but perhaps this level of Government sector collaboration is slightly politically incorrect in this Administration and they feel constrained from doing so.

Finally on detailed procurement, will the Minister comment on what appears to be the successful thermal imagery airborne laser designation update on the Jaguar aircraft? We have all read reports on a rapid and cost-effective update. It appears that, again, pilots are heavily involved in the process through the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. Again, we could be looking at a significant breakthrough in methodology. The House will be interested in such a report from the Minister.

More generally, all Governments must recognise the impact of purchasing decisions on the size and configuration of the defence industry. The joint Trade and Industry and Defence Select Committee report outlined that succinctly. Let us note that report's conclusions:

"Since the Government is the only significant UK purchaser of defence equipment, it cannot ignore the impact of its decisions on the UK's defence industries. We welcome the changes in MOD's attitude towards procurement, such as the greater willingness to take account of the future of MOD's supply base, the move towards partnership relationships with suppliers, the increased emphasis on dual use technologies and the greater emphasis on collaboration within Europe. However, these changes are tending to be reflected in procurement decisions in an ad hoc way, chiefly in the major decisions. Our recommendations are designed to change this, particularly through taking account of industrial interests more systematically, a longer term approach to the retention of capabilities and leading-edge technology, an increased emphasis on the technology base of the defence industries and related civil industries, and recognition of the importance of the defence industries and their technology and skills to the UK economy."

I would especially emphasise the phrase

"particularly through taking account of industrial interests more systematically".

That is reinforced by the recognition in the defence estimates, which state:

"The Department is British Industry's largest single customer. Our procurement decisions can therefore have a significant impact on the shape of the Defence Industry. We recognise the need to take defence industrial factors fully into account in our decision-making and have reviewed our procedures to ensure that this is done systematically as part of our programming and project evaluation process."

That and the paragraphs that follow are all reminiscent of last year's Labour party document "Strategy for a Secure Future" and a considerable move away from previous Government doctrine.

As the MOD moves towards making key decisions on both aircraft and missile purchases, it must start to develop a view of how those will impact on relationships and the corporate structure of the British and European aerospace industry, as well as our relationship with the United States defence industry. It appears that there may be some divergence of opinion between the MOD and the Department of Trade and Industry on the question of vertical or horizontal integration, but, if it is accepted—and it should be—that there is some urgency about rationalisation, the resolution of this becomes imperative, especially in the light of the rapid consolidation of the United States industry. Labour's policy document "Strategy for a Secure Future" points the way ahead to a more positive and realistic policy.

In that context, I suppose it would be churlish not to congratulate the Government on the decision to proceed with the Tornado upgrade rather than following the option that was trailed of leasing F16s from the United States, but the question that we must ask, as with the extraordinary saga of the Army field ambulance and the contest between Land Rover and the Austrians, is simple: why were those options considered in the first place? It is no wonder that, when defence manufacturers were giving evidence to the joint Select Committee, they said:

"The UK MOD's procurement policies are seen as verging on the hostile to the indigenous industrial base".

Can we imagine that being said in all seriousness about the American, French or defence ministries and their industrial structures? Perhaps that explains the Minister's facile response on the unsuitability of foreign chartered ships for Operation Purple Star, one of which was a Ukrainian ship which, after it arrived in America, was tied up, and then substantial fines had to be paid to get it repaired.

The industry could have gleaned some hope on 23 May 1995 when the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), said:

"The Ministry of Defence needs to continue to give due consideration to the possible consequences of procurement decisions for the defence industrial base."

With his departure, however, we seem to have slipped back again to relying on two legs of the stool—operational effectiveness and price—rather than also considering the third leg of industrial capability.

Let us be clear. When we buy abroad without proper reciprocation, we pay twice: once for the equipment and then for the people thrown out of work. Then we pay again because of our reduced ability to sell into third markets, so any national purchasing policy should be mindful of the industrial implications.

That is shown by the case of the defence helicopter flying school. Let us leave on one side whether the privatisation is a good idea and concentrate on the procurement process. It appears evident that all the aircraft options would be from abroad. I accept that that seems to be for straightforward availability reasons. When I asked the Minister what level of offset or industrial participation we would be seeking, I was informed that it was being put out to tender, so industrial participation was not appropriate. I pointed out that the formalities of the contractual relationship would not have deterred the Minister's French counterpart.

I am pleased that the position has been reviewed and that bidders have been advised that industrial participation will be sought. Obviously I am pleased about that, and the Minister can take credit for being open-minded and receptive. The question remains why that was not done in the first place. Why do not the MOD Procurement Executive and Ministers get into the frame of mind to buy British first wherever possible?

Will the Minister take the opportunity to make a statement about the replacement helicopters for transporting the royal family? Will the Westland EH101 be chosen, or will we once again be advertising another country's wares? It is bad enough having Lady Diana charging around in a BMW, without providing a flying advertisement for our competitors.

The Minister's opening speech was vintage Soames—full of detail, and rightly proud of the RAF's record through history and in the past year. However, the hon. Gentleman was a little light on analysis and future vision. We need to examine the new role and priorities of the armed forces in the wake of the ending of the cold war.

[Mr. Spellar]

Is not that just what the Joint Chiefs of Staff are doing, in developing the doctrine for our component of the joint rapid reaction force?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind words—and I mean that. I fully appreciate that he had to write his speech before hearing mine, but did not the hon. Gentleman listen to my points about the changes to air operations, adjustment to peacekeeping operations, creation of the permanent joint headquarters, rapid deployment force and the new range of joint and combined operations?

Mr. Spellar: Certainly I did, and rightly drew attention to the re-examination by the Joint Chiefs, particularly with regard to the joint rapid reaction force. However, a broader analysis is needed than the Minister described. We must evaluate where our troops might go, how they would get there, what they would do when they got there, the back-up that they would need, how and at what point they would come home, and the role that aircraft would play in the projection of power. We owe such an evaluation not only to our forces but to equipment manufacturers, who need a clear indication of our future intentions. The Minister may believe that he has produced such an evaluation, but that is not clear to outsiders—particularly in industry.

Dean Acheson said that Britain had lost an empire but not yet found a role. Over the past 50 years, our role has been defined by the raw realities of the cold war. We no longer face the single unified threat, but the world is still a dangerous and difficult place. We have the opportunity to redefine Britain's place in that world and the role of our armed forces.

It would be of considerable value to the country if, in arriving at that redefinition, we could maintain broad national consensus on defence policy objectives—which we had in the past under Labour and Conservative Governments. Such consensus would not stifle political conflict or debate. We will still argue about the effectiveness and competence of Ministers in implementing the policy. I am sure that next year, Conservative Members will make such criticisms of us, but less effectively.

We need consensus on broad objectives and policy outlines. That sentiment will find an echo in all parts of the House, apart from the hon. Member for Crawley, and throughout the country. That is the challenge facing us. I hope that the Minister is big enough to rise to it, and I hope that the rest of us will—because that is what the country needs and the forces require.

5.23 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The part of the speech of the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) that I liked best was his opening remarks about the Spitfire, which were appropriate on a day like today. Some of the Schneider trophy races that took place during the Spitfire's development were held in my constituency, at Calshot Point. Mitchell worked at Southampton university; Spitfire prototypes were flown from Eastleigh, which is close to my constituency; and during the war the Spitfire was made at North Baddesley, which is in my constituency. It was appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to begin his speech with references to that fine and romantic aircraft, but then he lost the thread, and my support for many of his other remarks.

I want to put on record the name of Tom Paravicini, who served on our district council with me for many years. He was a modest man and a good councillor. We knew that he had something to do with Rolls-Royce, but we were never sure what it was until we buried him the last year. From the funeral oration, we discovered that Mr. Paravicini was a leading engineer at Rolls-Royce and was given responsibility and credit for making the Merlin engine more powerful, enabling the Spitfire and Hurricane to fly 30 knots faster. We pay credit to pilots and ground crews, but we often forget the people who designed the aircraft and gave our pilots the leading edge in combat. I am glad to use this opportunity to digress from the general theme of the debate to pay tribute to that remarkable man.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Minister and of the hon. Member for Warley, West that it is appropriate to hold this debate on 6 June, which is the anniversary of D-day. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks, and give him credit for being a Minister who is more enthusiastic about his Ministry and the armed forces he serves through the MOD than any other Minister of State that I have known during my time in the House.

The only unfortunate thing about the timing of the debate is that the Defence Select Committee is halfway through one of its regular inquiries into the Royal Air Force. It is a bit too early to quote any conclusions that we may reach, but we have been given plenty of indicators that are worth mentioning without risk of upstaging our report. I will concentrate on two fundamental components of any successful armed force: manning and morale.

I acknowledge that, although the RAF may be the youngest of our armed forces, during and since world war 2 it has been the key to winning battles and wars. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned D-day. Air supremacy—I use that word rather than "superiority"—was vital to that victory. Air supremacy is often difficult to achieve, but it was achieved in the latter part of world war 2 and in the Gulf war—when it undoubtedly led to the low loss of life on the allied side. Air supremacy was not so easy to achieve in the Falklands war, which meant that it was always going to be a close-run thing. Argentina should have achieved air supremacy, but did not—largely due to the vigilance and efforts of the sentinel ships, which ensured our control of upper air space and denied the Argentines the one vital advantage that they could have possessed, being so near the Falklands.

Air power is involved much more in all aspects of the United Nations "Agenda for Peace", in both peacemaking and peacekeeping. The ability to precision-bomb military targets without harming civilians is a useful political weapon: a big stick to back up soft talk. United Nations operations may occur anywhere in the world, but often it is not until they become NATO operations that they are effective. We have seen evidence of that in the former Yugoslavia and then in Bosnia.

It is particularly good news that, at the recent NATO council meeting in Berlin, agreement was reached in principle between the United State of America and its European allies on the proposed joint task force. That

must bring France closer to full NATO membership, because French forces will be included in the task force. France may also be signed up to NATO's military committee, which would be extremely welcome.

Since 1989, we have seen the advent of the so-called "new world order". The other day I spoke to people at *Jane's Defence Weekly*, who described the new world order as world disorder. They said that we are entering the most dangerous decade of human existence, a sentiment which I believe is shared by analysts and political scientists on every continent. Almost a decade after the Berlin wall fell, the world is still gripped by conflict, tension and mistrust. There are 17 major conflicts under way around the world, and a further 20 areas of special concern in which conflict could break out at any time.

Our armed forces still have very important roles to play, and they are currently being deployed in 33 countries worldwide. They must be mobile to meet today's requirements. That is why I am pleased that so many references have already been made to the need for heavy-lift air transports. I see in the statement on the defence estimates that, on the future of large aircraft, the Secretary of State said:

"We continue to work with partner nations and industry to establish a satisfactory basis for the United Kingdom to rejoin the European Future Large Aircraft project, to meet the requirement for the balance of the Hercules replacement programme."

In his closing remarks, I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bring us up to date on the European future large aircraft, on exactly who our partners are likely to be and on whether there will be sales to third countries.

When the hon. Member for Warley, West referred to procurement matters, he said that we must as a priority buy British. I support that in principle, but buying British need not necessarily mean buying a primarily British product. It may be better to have a share in a bigger project that will enjoy wider world sales than to buy a product that happens to be British but will not sell anywhere else in the world.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): As my hon. Friend and other interested colleagues know, the subject of the maritime reconnaissance aircraft replacement is currently very much on everyone's minds. I wonder how he would fit what he has just said into that framework. There are obviously a number of contenders. We perhaps have access to the Minister's ear, and decisions may soon be made. Does my hon. Friend accept that the most important matter when considering that project is that there should be the maximum amount of British involvement, that the overall lifetime cost should be a primary consideration and, obviously, that the best equipment for the job should be procured?

Mr. Colvin: I am delighted to have given my hon. Friend an opportunity to intervene to make that good constituency point; there will no doubt be headlines in his local paper this weekend.

I am not in the business of trying to prejudge the outcome of these contests because I acknowledge that, despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green said, many of the projects are collaboratory. In the case of the Nimrod proposal, Boeing is very much a partner in that exercise and may well help to sell the British Aerospace proposal to third countries. One must bear that in mind, which is why I think that the decision to replace our aging Hercules with the C130J aircraft, built by Lockheed, was the right decision.

I am particularly pleased that the 100 per cent. offsets that were provided for in that contract—the so-called "industrial participation"—are being honoured. Now that the C130J has successfully made its maiden flight, it would also be of interest to the House if the Minister would tell us how many third countries are likely to buy that aircraft and what the world sales might ultimately amount to. Bearing in mind the very large British component in that aircraft—which is ostensibly an American aircraft—the prospects for British jobs are very good. Thus, while I accept the proposition of the hon. Member for Warley, West that it is a good idea to buy British, that does not necessarily mean always buying British aircraft.

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend mentioned the C130J. I wonder whether he is aware that Lockheed has decided to review its subcontractors for any export orders that it may obtain for that aircraft. It may well be that the British contractors that are working on the C130J for the Royal Air Force will not be those selected if other exports are produced. That should be borne in mind when a decision is taken on the project that he mentioned.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. A certain amount of rumour is going around and there are press reports to that effect, but again the Minister must have better knowledge about this matter than we have. I have certainly been told by Lockheed that the provision for British work on that aircraft will be honoured for sales to third countries, which is why we would like to know to whom those sales will be made. Obviously every country buying the aircraft will also fight very hard for its own offsets. There must be some flexibility, but we would like to know what the C130J project will ultimately deliver in terms of British jobs.

It has never been more important to have an air force that is fully manned—recruitment is currently not bad, according to the RAF—well trained, with high morale and with the best equipment that money can buy. To my mind, leading edge technology equals the killing edge in battle.

RAF manpower has dropped from 83,000 in 1992-93 to 63,000 next year. It will descend even lower thereafter, to 56,000. On 13 March this year, which I have referred to as "brown envelope day", RAF service men and women received the news about redundancies or premature voluntary retirement. Reportedly the terms were very generous, but slightly more than 3,000 people who asked to leave under the voluntary redundancy terms were not fortunate enough to be granted it. They wanted to leave and were told no. I should like to know what will be the effect on morale of their having to go on serving and how they are regarded by their unit commanders, superior officers and warrant officers.

Morale is very important. Out of a total reduction of 8,300, there are to be 5,500 redundancies this year, of which 1,000 will be compulsory. What about the promotion prospects for those who remain? That question is often asked of the Select Committee by airmen when we visit RAF stations—as are questions on the

[Mr. Colvin]

consequences of contractorisation. When the Committee took evidence from the assistant chief of the air staff on 1 May, he said:

"over the last few years there has certainly been a dip in promotion opportunities as a result of the turbulence that we have gone through. That dip is now coming to an end and we are now returning to the historic levels of promotion opportunity across the board for airmen and officers."

The Committee has for some time taken note of the turbulence that the RAF has been through. Over the years we have been increasingly concerned about the stresses and strains experienced by service personnel and their families. Last year, in our report on the statement on the defence estimates, we said:

"The development and publication of detailed measures of turbulence in the RAF is long overdue; we will expect such measures to be available by the time of publication of SDE 96."

We now have SDE 96, but we have no reference to the RAF's objectives or targets on turbulence or tour intervals. That is a worry. The Army has managed a target, as has the Royal Navy, and I really think that the Royal Air Force should be able to do so. That would have a marked effect on morale.

I should also like to know the effect on morale of the Government's plans for the sale of married quarters, a subject mentioned by the Opposition spokesman. When the Minister of State for Defence Procurement gave evidence to the Select Committee yesterday, he was batting on a very sticky wicket but he carried his bat and carried it well and he managed to allay some of the fears expressed. I hope that he will be able to tell us today that the Treasury is not going to plunder all the proceeds.

The Minister issued to his parliamentary colleagues a letter which states:

"In defence terms, our need is to provide the services with the right housing, in the right places, at the right time."

I would also suggest that it should be at the right rent. The letter goes on to say that there are two key misapprehensions:

"Misapprehension number one. It has been suggested that recent rises in Married Quarter charges are somehow linked to the Sale—almost as though there were some 'hidden agenda' to discourage Service families from living in married quarters . . .

Misapprehension number 2. It has been suggested that the Sale will lead to the break-up of Service communities, and the introduction into Service housing 'patches' of undesirable neighbours."

I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to allay such fears today, as he did yesterday when giving evidence to the Select Committee. That, too, would have a marked effect on the morale of our armed forces.

Germany has now taken over responsibility for the defence of German air space. Two Phantom squadrons have already been disbanded, withdrawal is planned from RAF Bruggen which is closing in the year 2002, when four Tornado GR1 squadrons are to move back to the United Kingdom. The other station, at Laarbruch, is due to close in 1999. What savings will be made as a result of those closures and of those squadrons returning to this country? A figure of £25 million has been mentioned, but is that the gross figure—simply the expenditure saved in Germany—or is it a net figure for the savings made after the provision of additional facilities for the squadrons in this country has been taken into account?

The changes will mean, for example, that 2,500 RAF staff and their families will return to the United Kingdom. Where will the squadrons be based? Will an adequate number of married quarters have been retained in close proximity to the bases to enable them to be manned at an appropriate level?

I am sorry to ask a barrage of questions, but that is what these debates are for. Are we negotiating with our German allies for the use of their airfields in the event of our participation in NATO or United Nations operations, even if Germany may not be involved in them?

Reference has already been made to the difficulties experienced with spares and the support for aircraft. The Committee has visited stations and talked to ground crews to whom the Minister has already paid proper tribute. The ground crews are working longer hours, especially on Tornados. Surely it is just as important to ensure that they do not get over-tired as it is to ensure that aircrews are not over-tired. The ground crews complain about a lack of spares and about having to rob other aircraft for spares to keep the front-line aircraft flying. Perhaps "borrow" would be a better word than "rob", but, however one describes it, it involves double labour costs—crews have to take the spare part off one aircraft, put it on another and then replace the part on the first aircraft. At some stations we heard the expression the "rolling rob" because it is a continuous process. Why is it necessary?

In spite of these and other difficulties, we still have the world's finest Air Force, which is looking forward to a period of greater stability so that it can get on with the job of defending the realm, as it did with such valour exactly 52 years ago.

5.42 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am surprised to be speaking in today's debate on the Royal Air Force, but I am pleased to do so. I have always enjoyed contributing to what is usually an interesting and informative debate. I am glad to see that the usual suspects are here, plus one or two others. It is an important debate and we should have as many contributions as possible. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on his excellent speech. I do not wish to detain the House for long, but I have a serious constituency problem that is entirely the Government's fault, and it is my duty to bring the matter to the attention of the House.

During the 1992 general election, the Conservative candidate in my constituency claimed that a Labour Government would close RAF Carlisle, but that, if the electors voted for him and there were a Tory Government it would be kept open. Just as the Conservatives broke their tax pledge, they broke their promise about RAF Carlisle, and it is to close in March next year.

Mr. Hargreaves: The electors in Carlisle voted for you.

Mr. Martlew: Yes, but I did not decide to close RAF Carlisle; it was the Minister's decision. The blame lies not with the Labour party but with the Tories. However, as the Chief Whip has just reminded me, we must not get too excited.

The Government then undertook a sham consultation. It started in December 1993 and finished in June 1994. During that time, the trade unions suggested some very good alternative proposals that would have saved 50 per

cent. of the jobs and still have provided the Ministry of Defence with the savings that it required. The Government rejected those proposals, but delayed the decision until the week after the European elections for political reasons. The Tory candidate in those elections was heavily defeated anyway, so it made no difference.

During the consultation process, several delegations went to see Ministers, who said that, if it was decided to close the base, they would help to provide alternative employment and to make the best use of the site, which is very large and in a prime area next to the motorway.

I remind the House that, in November 1994, the Select Committee on Defence said of site disposal that criteria other than the highest price should be taken into account, and the Government accepted that aspect of the Committee's report. The Government therefore accept the importance of community provision. Nevertheless, we have a major problem with RAF Carlisle.

After the decision to close the base was taken, the local authorities, although they were very angry, decided to work with the Ministry of Defence and English Partnerships to develop a scheme to market and manage the site. There was talk of creating a joint venture company. It appeared to be working and the MOD was very enthusiastic. Four major companies are interested in moving to the site.

This spring, however, a bombshell was dropped. The Government decided to pull out of the joint venture and to sell the site in one go to the private sector. This has created tremendous problems in my constituency. At the very least, it will mean serious delays in getting businesses on to the site. It will mean the loss of European money and a loss of money from English Partnerships. I have grave doubts about whether the whole of the site will be developed, because the private sector will cherry-pick, selling the good parts of the site and leaving other parts derelict. That is not a sensible way to develop the land.

I informed the Minister that I would be asking this question and I am hoping for a reply this evening. Will he reconsider the decision to market-test the site, so that we can return to the previous plan, whereby the local authorities, the Ministry of Defence and the private sector will work together to get the best deal for my constituents and to make up for some of the 800 jobs that we have lost?

As if all that was not bad enough and my constituency had not suffered enough, the Government suddenly came along with a new idea. I accept that they have problems with the culling of cows due to bovine spongiform encephalopathy, but I blame them for the BSE problem. They had originally decided to store bonemeal and the end product of the rendering of cull cows at a former RAF base, RAF Quedgeley in Gloucester, but the decision was then changed. One wonders whether it was changed because Gloucester is an extremely marginal Tory seat and the idea was not very popular with the people there.

Will the Minister confirm that, instead, hundreds of tonnes of bone meal will be sent to RAF Carlisle? He must realise that not only will there be a smell in Carlisle that we do not want, but we shall have a terrible job trying to market a site with hundreds of tonnes of stinking waste in its hangars. In his winding-up speech, will he give Carlisle some good news for a change—first, that he will reconsider his decision on market testing of the site and, secondly, that the bonemeal will not be sent to RAF Carlisle?

5.50 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I should like to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) in saying many things about the Royal Air Force, of which we are all very proud, but I shall not, with reluctance, because of the amount of time that I promised to speak. I am very grateful for catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so early in the debate. Although I would be very glad to follow my hon. Friend in his argument, I shall refrain from doing so, and will concentrate on two local matters that affect the RAF and are connected with the forthcoming closure of a local base.

In echoing what other hon. Members have said, I am very proud of the RAF and rightly regard it as the greatest air force in the world. It does not matter intrinsically if it is not necessarily the biggest. I am full of admiration for the way in which it has coped with its retrenchment, the inevitable reductions following the end of the cold war, and its changing role.

As I said in an intervention, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for keeping closely in touch with me on the forthcoming closure of RAF Stanmore Park, on which I shall concentrate my remarks. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and the House—it is another reason for my deliberate brevity—for being unable to be present at the tail end of the debate due to constituency meetings. I shall therefore read the debate in *Hansard* carefully. I would not expect my hon. Friend to respond to the questions I ask if I am not present. Perhaps they can be answered later by letter and I hope that he will keep in touch, as I shall with my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

It is obviously very sad for us to accept that, as has been expected for many years, RAF Stanmore Park is to close. It is to close on 1 April 1997, although it will function in a residual way for at least a few months after that, with some RAF and civilian personnel carrying on working there, as it is gradually run down. The closure is sad for all sorts of reasons. The base has a 60-year history since it was created in 1936, which has been a most wonderful period. All the people who have worked there over many years—RAF personnel and civilians—are rightly proud of what has been done, but, again, I shall not go into detail. The greatest sadness is caused not only by the sentimental history of the base, although that is important, but by the loss of jobs, even though the number may seem small in comparison to what has happened in the private sector over many recent years and in other RAF facilities and installations.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote to me on 23 May to confirm the most recent stage of the plans, having considered all the options and having taken option 3B. The reality, even in an area that is considered traditionally prosperous—the outer London borough of Harrow—is daunting. We have had enough job losses in all respects and do not want any more. In his letter, my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"In addition to the closure, and in keeping with the RAF's overall manpower plans, we propose to contractorise that catering function at RAF Bentley Priory and RAF Stanmore Park while it remains in use. The total number of posts assigned to RAF Stanmore Park is currently 146 Service and 62 Civilians. Of these 57 Service and 25 Civilian posts would transfer to RAF Bentley Priory, RAF Northolt and RAF Uxbridge".

Although I am glad that some of my hon. Friends will benefit from those changes, naturally I am sad that the emphasis, changeover and shift of physical and human resources will not concentrate overwhelmingly and exclusively on RAF Bentley Priory. My hon. Friend goes on to say:

"36 Service and 20 Civilian posts would be subject to contractorisation and 53 Service and 17 Civilian posts would become entirely surplus to requirements."

My hon. Friend said that RAF Stanmore Park will officially close as an independent unit, but Bentley Priory will be expanded, in a modest way, but at least creating some additional RAF and civilian jobs. New facilities are also to be built for NCOs and other ranks in respect of catering, accommodation, and so on.

I naturally welcome that. Since RAF Bentley Priory is the not only primordial base of the two bases concerned but one of the main important bases or sub-bases in the entire RAF panoply—at least in southern England, if not nationally—I welcome the fact that it is not only to be preserved but enhanced.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that a period of consultation with trade unions and other interested parties is beginning. I should very much like to keep closely in touch with him and his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence as the stages unfold. I am willing to assist in any way in the painful process to ensure that we minimise as much as possible compulsory redundancies—I hope that there are none at all—and create the most enhanced redeployment so that everybody is placed elsewhere. Indeed, I am more optimistic about that possibility than I was a year or 18 months ago.

I should be grateful for regular and intensive consultation and contact as the matter unfolds and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the contact so far. Even though I am unable to be present for the end of the debate, for which I apologise again, I would be grateful for anything that can be said, and shall keep in touch.

This is a good opportunity to put on record another local matter that is of great concern, even though it is proceeding out of the hands of the MOD and the RAF to other Government Departments and local agencies—mainly the Department of the Environment. I mention it in this debate because one of the principal buildings on the site concerned, Government Buildings, in London road in Stanmore, was the old RAF directorate of recruiting building, which dealt with a considerable number of personnel about five years ago and is now closing down, like all the other buildings. The site has become surplus to requirements and available for redevelopment.

Naturally, there is enormous anxiety among residents in the area about what will happen. As the Member representing their interests, who is in regular and frequent touch with them and the newly created residents association in the north-eastern corner of Stanmore, I should like to make a plea. Since the Ministry of Defence has a residual involvement and there are connections with the Department of the Environment and consultations between officials about the site, I very much hope that any redevelopment will be kept to the very minimum. It would be right to return most of the site to its original green belt designation. Since it has such a designation, there cannot be other than a marginal change of use under the regulations.

It is very important that the public agencies responsible for the disposal of the land ensure that the wishes of the local residents are the most important. It is quite legitimate, regular and important for me to request that of the relevant Government officials in this debate. If there is any development, I hope that it will be extremely marginal, only at the southern end of the area, and that the rest of the site will be returned to its original green belt usage.

There is no need for the Treasury to become over-obsessed with the apparent possibility of maximising every disposal to the detriment of local residents, who want only marginal, high-quality housing that is consonant with the existing housing provision. That would be right and proper for all concerned.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again for your indulgence in calling me early in the debate.

5.58 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): I begin with a proposition that I believe will enjoy support in all sections of the House—that the Royal Air Force needs a period of stability. Even the bald numbers by means of which the Minister explained the changes in Royal Air Force personnel at the beginning of the debate are themselves sufficient to justify that argument. In 1990, when "Options for Change" was first discussed—at almost exactly this time of year, if my memory serves me correctly—there were 90,000 people in the Royal Air Force. As the Minister told us, by 1999 that figure will have been reduced to 52,500.

By reason of "Options for Change", the defence costs study and other minor reviews, those in the Royal Air Force must sometimes have felt as though they were engaged in a perpetual cultural revolution—and it is a revolution that still has three years to run. The "turbulence"—the euphemism that is sometimes used to describe such change in the services—has a long time to run before we shall be able to say that it has been overcome. In that context it is reasonable to say that, to manage those changes properly, a period of stability is required.

As well as the reduction in personnel, there has been substantial restructuring of the Royal Air Force itself. There has been the merging of 11 Group and 18 Group, the moving of 1 Group headquarters to High Wycombe, and the total disbanding of 2 Group. If we considered the effect of changes of that sort on any comparable civilian organisation, we would not have to think for long before realising that they must have consequences affecting efficiency, capability and morale.

When those changes are coupled with the commitments that the Minister explained in detail—commitments to the implementation force in the former Yugoslavia, to the force keeping guard over Kurdistan and northern Iraq and to that engaged in connection with southern Iraq, plus our continuing commitment in the Falklands and other places—it is hardly surprising that this has been a period of perhaps unprecedented change for the Royal Air Force.

In such a debate it is important to recognise those difficulties, and not simply to pretend that they do not exist, or that they would not in any circumstances have serious consequences. One consequence has certainly arisen. Questions have been asked about the readiness of

Tornado squadrons in particular. We are told that, on one day in September last year, only six of the 36 GR1 Tornados stationed at Bruggen were serviceable.

For many of us that raises eerie recollections reminiscent of the state of British armoured units in Germany at the time of the Gulf war, when we were able to meet our requirements in the Gulf only by substantially cannibalising the tanks and other armoured vehicles left behind in Germany. The capability of the Royal Air Force is right at the centre of the justification for its existence, so in such a debate it would be wrong not to recognise that the present situation gives rise for concern.

We know that Royal Air Force NATO inspections have been suspended during the transitional period, as have what are called tacevals—tactical evaluations of particular units. RAF Leuchars, a front-line air base in my constituency, used to be subject to regular tacevals, but they have been suspended in an attempt to reduce the burdens on Royal Air Force personnel dealing with the dramatic changes that I have already mentioned.

That is understandable, but inevitably it affects our degree of knowledge about the state of readiness of those units. If we take away regular assessment, we cannot know which areas of activity or potential activity are up to standard and which are not. That is why I say that in such a debate we should not conceal the difficulties. Difficulties can be managed properly only when they have been acknowledged.

Our natural admiration for the Royal Air Force, which has been expressed by almost every hon. Member who has spoken, and I guess will also be expressed by everyone who speaks later, should not lead us to conclude, rather after the manner of Voltaire's "Candide", that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

I remain, as I suspect does the whole House, wholly committed to Eurofighter 2000. It is vital for the Royal Air Force, and unquestionably vital for the United Kingdom aerospace industry. It is a matter of some relief to many of us that the work-share agreement now appears rather more firmly based than previously, and that the co-operation and agreement, between ourselves and Germany in particular, appears to be at a much more acceptable level than it has seemed to be on some of the more fraught occasions since 1992.

As others are, I am attracted by the idea that there may be an additional purchase for the Royal Air Force of up to 70 more Eurofighters than those for which we are presently contracted. I understand that that would mean that, by about 10 years into the next century, the fast jet fleet of the Royal Air Force would consist of the Eurofighter and the Tornado GR4. I can see economies of scale arising from that arrangement. We would not have to retain such a wide range of spares, and we would also have the advantage of specialisation. There would be a whole range of advantages for us if the fleet were configured in that way.

However, there might also be disadvantages in terms of operational capability. If the fleet consisted only of Eurofighters and Tornado GR4s, the flexibility that we presently enjoy would be prejudiced. I therefore hope that, when we think about whether to purchase a further tranche of Eurofighters and to proceed as I understand is under consideration, serious attention will be given to the effect that such a decision could have on the operational capability of the service.

The single big procurement issue of the moment is the replacement maritime patrol aircraft.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, there are lots of issues.

Mr. Campbell: In the minds of those who are beating a path to the doors of members of the Defence Select Committee, the RMPA, and perhaps CASOM—the conventionally armed stand-off missile—and the anti-armour weapon, are the three issues of the time.

It is generally accepted that the RMPA has long been needed, and clearly the resolution of the three competing bids will take great sensitivity and require very careful and accurate decision-making. One of the difficulties is that all three bids, in different ways, have substantial United Kingdom components. In that sense, they all involve our national interest. As we have already heard, for some Members they involve acute constituency interests, which have conditioned and coloured some of the contributions that we have heard today.

When dealing with such an issue, it is relatively easy to state the principles; it is in the application of those principles that the difficulty arises. The first principle is that the Royal Air Force should get the best aircraft for the job. The second principle is that that should be done at reasonable cost, and that acquisition cost and through-life costs should both be considered. The third principle is that we should support United Kingdom industry.

Again, I doubt whether there would be much dissent from those statements of principle. It is when we come to make the decision, and to decide how much weight to attach to any one of the principles, that the difficulties arise. The same principles apply to the CASOM and the air-launched anti-armour weapon.

I do not know what other Members' experience is, but, as I have hinted already, I do not think that any projects have ever produced such intensive lobbying of those of us in the House who have an interest in defence matters. That is no reflection on the companies involved, because they have a clear and legitimate interest in trying to put their agenda before those Members.

However, if we do not have access to the information that is normally considered commercially confidential, much of that lobbying, however sincere it may be, has little significance. Unless one has access to the detailed acquisition and through-life costs of the project believed to be the most economical, how can one make a judgment? That is an advantage that the Minister enjoys—perhaps it is a burden that he carries—that is simply not available to others.

I share the reluctance of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, on the matter. How can those of us who do not have access to all the information make informed and intelligent judgments about decisions which, by their nature, are extremely complex? Therefore, like the hon. Gentleman, I have avoided making a commitment in any direction. Of course, I have the good fortune not to have a direct constituency interest, and that has rather assisted me to adopt this purist position.

I do have an interest, in that RAF Leuchars is based within my constituency. Two squadrons of F3 aircraft are based there, and I had the privilege of being flown in the back seat of one of those aircraft nearly 12 months ago.

[Mr. Campbell]

It was a remarkable experience that I recommend to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although the white knuckles that you find yourself subject to during the flight are likely to stay with you for some time after.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here at the moment, because I wished to offer him my personal and uninhibited congratulations on the fact that he was responsible for an outbreak of common sense in the Ministry of Defence. We have now put aside what many people regarded as the wholly intolerable suggestion that we should not have the mid-life update of the F3, air-to-air missiles and avionics, and that we should embark upon what most of us thought was the improbable course of action of leasing from the United States F16 aircraft, some of which would have to be updated anyway.

In addition, these aircraft were not in any way compatible with the existing tanker capacity of the RAF. We would have appeared peculiar if, while being the landlord and leasing F3s to the Italian air force, we were simultaneously being the tenants by leasing F16s back from the United States. More seriously, that would have raised substantial doubts in the minds of many people about our commitment to the Eurofighter. I congratulate the Government and the Ministry of Defence on the entirely sensible decision, although I have the suspicion that it was more than a little influenced by the attitudes of hon. Members.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement has received so many requests to respond during his reply that it may end up being of almost marathon length—if I can say that within three or four weeks of the opening of the Olympic games. Will he tell me, however—either now or later—the precise state of the Jaguar upgrade? When will the thermal imaging and laser designator be brought into service? Will he confirm that the Hercules replacement is still on schedule? In particular, what is the position with regard to the EH101?

Some reference has been made to the married quarters estate. I do not presume for a moment to try to anticipate the conclusions that the Defence Select Committee will reach on that matter, but the Minister may feel that the questioning on it was not so much friendly fire as intensive cross-examination. I have not been persuaded that the Government's proposed scheme is appropriate.

There is some attraction in the proposition by the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), who is no longer in the Chamber, that the Government consider selling those properties and those parts of the defence estate that are superfluous to requirements, and applying the sums raised to the rehabilitation of the existing housing stock. That would bring about the required improvement and would reduce the burden of management that the MOD bears in relation to the overall defence estate. In addition, it would have the advantage of placating those wives who have been fired up by the proposals, and who may make a formidable enemy for the MOD.

More seriously, there is no doubt that the proposals have caused a great deal of apprehension in all three services, and the Government should be slow to proceed unless they can satisfy themselves that that apprehension has, in all substantial parts, been alleviated. So far, I do not feel that the Government have reached that state of grace.

I also offer my congratulations on the decision to withdraw the RAF from Bruggen. As recently as the previous RAF debate in May last year, the Minister of State was making a most robust defence of the need to maintain RAF Bruggen because of the political and military significance of the base. Not much has changed in politics or in the military in the past 12 months, but the arguments in favour of retaining the RAF presence at Bruggen have long since been diluted. In particular, the fact that low flying is inhibited in Germany—meaning that the aircraft had to return to the United Kingdom anyway—raised substantial questions in the minds of many people about the utility of maintaining the RAF presence at Bruggen. It will be the end of a remarkable historical connection, but, in my view, it is entirely justified.

Two questions were asked by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside on the matter. First, where will the squadrons go? That is, obviously, a matter of some concern. Secondly, from a tactical and strategic point of view, what facilities will be available to UK aircraft in Germany if the squadrons are required for operational reasons in the future? Germany is our partner in NATO and is taking an increasing responsibility within it. It also has an increasing ability to support UN operations because of the views taken by its constitutional court. There is nothing difficult about that, but it is clearly an important matter when considering the consequences of the withdrawal.

On an occasion such as this, it is right to look ahead. The issue of procurement is one about which we should have some concern, as it relates to the future of the RAF. Remarkable though it may seem—as the first Eurofighter is not due to come into service until 2000—we must now consider what will replace the Eurofighter, and we should certainly consider the replacement for the Tornado GR1, or GR4 as it is to become. The Government have signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States to participate in the JAST programme.

I have been gratified by some of the observations made by the Secretary of State, who has now joined us, about a greater recognition of the need for a coherent European defence industry. In my judgment, the European defence industry will shape and will be shaped by the procurement decisions of European air forces, particularly the RAF. I hope that the conclusion reached by the Trade and Industry and Defence Committee, to whose report reference has been made, and the greater recognition of the European component on the part of the MoD will apply when decisions are taken about which aircraft are to replace Eurofighter and which are to replace the Tornado.

The matter of capability is one for the future. In my judgment, we must try as far as we can to maintain an all-round range of capability so that the RAF is able to operate at high, medium and low levels. Some people appear to believe that if we acquire the conventionally armed stand-off missile, it will be a substitute for low-level operations. In my judgment, that is a wholly flawed analysis.

Those who believe that CASOM will bring to an end the requirement for low flying simply do not understand the purpose of the acquisition of this weapons system. It is not a substitute for our ability to press home low-level attacks, if those are necessary, but an additional capability. Its acquisition should be seen as a supplement, not a substitute. I hope that those who are so enthusiastic

in their support for CASOM—justifiably, in my judgment, because we require such a weapons system—will understand that it will not mean a reduction in low flying or the capacity to press home attacks at the lowest level. If we are to maintain an all-round range of capability, we must be able to operate at high, medium and low levels.

We who legislate on such matters bear a moral obligation. On occasion, we ask the Royal Air Force to meet the worst case and to operate under the most stringent and acute conditions. We may need to deploy our forces against some of the most advanced weapons systems in the world.

If we compromise on the capability of our air force, two problems may result. We may be unable to contribute to United Nations or NATO operations at the level that we would prefer, and it may also result in casualty rates to Royal Air Force aircrew that are politically unacceptable. That is the argument for ensuring that capability is maintained at the highest level, because we cannot legitimately ask those who put their lives at stake to fly in inadequate aircraft with insufficient weapons systems and inadequate defence systems. We talk here blithely about the contribution that the Royal Air Force makes and is likely to make, but we bear a moral obligation not to ask our young men—and perhaps our young women in the future—to put themselves at risk unless we are certain that we have provided them with the best possible equipment for the job.

Contractorisation is an issue for the future, but it contains a substantial element of risk. If there were a change of Government in 12 months' time, most people probably accept that there would not be a wholesale reversal of contractorisation. The Labour party's defence team has not confirmed that and I doubt whether it will, but if we have started down the road of contractorisation, the likelihood of a reversal is remote. The question that cannot be answered until an emergency arises is whether the private sector will be able to respond rapidly. That question may be unanswerable now, but we are entitled to be determined to ensure that when contractorisation becomes part of the support for the Royal Air Force, it is at the highest level available.

Those companies that are now under contract to provide many of the services previously performed in house—especially engineering—are currently using the skills of fast-jet mechanics, most of whom are former Royal Air Force personnel. That is fine, reasonable and a piece of good fortune for those companies, but those skills will degrade over time. The quality of training provided by the Royal Air Force will no longer be available.

We must ensure that the most stringent standards are written into the contractual arrangements between the Ministry of Defence and those who become contractors. The hon. Member for Warley, West suggested apprenticeships and there may be other ways to impose those standards, but we are entitled to insist that the terms of private contracts are sufficiently rigorous to give us the same standard of performance as we might have expected if the operations were carried out in house.

I have little doubt that the future of the Royal Air Force is most likely to be assured by increased European defence co-operation, although that opinion may be unpopular with some—not all—Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside, the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, referred to the return this week of the prodigal France into the bosom of the family and the recognition by the United States that combined joint task forces should be more than a concept and capable of implementation. Those decisions make it clear that there will be continuing pressure to recognise that the effectiveness of defence in Europe is best achieved on a combined and joint basis.

The Minister's opening speech referred to the Franco-British air group as an important example of the open-mindedness of the Ministry of Defence, and the Royal Air Force in particular, in such matters. I understood the Minister to say that the expansion of that group to other members of the WEU was being considered. That is the direction for defence policy, and the Royal Air Force will have an important and significant role to play in the evolution of concepts of defence that recognise far greater co-operation in Europe.

Political and economic considerations will have an equal influence on the degree of co-operation. At best, Europe will have stable defence budgets for the foreseeable future. In reality, defence budgets will probably continue to reduce by a percentage point here or by £500,000 there. I would not wish to lay serious money on the likelihood that defence budgets will increase materially in the next five years. That being so, common procurement, greater integration, interoperability and even force specialisation will become more important in the future.

I have an interest in the Royal Air Force in three separate capacities. I am the spokesman for my party on defence and I am a member of the Defence Select Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. He is no longer in his place, but he is a most vigorous and skilful Chairman who provides great leadership. As I have mentioned, I also have a constituency interest in RAF Leuchars. That front-line air base now alone provides the quick-reaction alert against intrusion into United Kingdom air space over the North sea. In all three capacities, I have the good fortune and the honour to view the Royal Air Force. As I do that, I am convinced that the men and women of today are a credit to the heritage of the Royal Air Force to which the Minister referred earlier. They continue to display the commitment, dedication and professionalism that has characterised the Royal Air Force for so many years. I am confident that, with the support of the House, they will continue to do so for a long time.

6.27 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I agree that the Royal Air Force serves this country exceptionally well, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State made that point effectively at the start of the debate. That was also apparent at the excellent recent presentation to Members of both Houses by the Royal Air Force presentation team and some senior officers.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) began by calling for stability for the Royal Air Force, and the Government have committed themselves to stability in defence organisation and spending. From the point of view of the Royal Air Force, the hon. and learned Gentleman must hope for continuity of Conservative government in the next few years. That is the only result that could guarantee the continuity of defence spending, as set out in the White Paper and elsewhere.

[Sir John Cope]

My concern arises from my constituency interest and involves the defence industrial base. I shall follow on from and, to a certain extent, agree with some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar). Towards the end of a somewhat thin speech, the hon. Gentleman complimented the report of the Select Committee, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) when he was at the Ministry of Defence, on the emphasis that they placed on the importance to this country of the defence industrial base.

The view has occasionally been expressed in some quarters of the Ministry of Defence that the health of the companies involved is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry, not the MOD, which should look for the best equipment for the forces at the best prices and allow companies' health to be the responsibility of others in government. But that is a narrow view. It is certainly in the national interest that the great defence companies of this country, both large and small—many small businesses are involved in defence—should continue to contribute a great deal to this nation.

It is said that 395,000 jobs in the United Kingdom are supported by defence goods and services, of which about 80,000 are dependent on exports. There are more people in the defence industries than there are in the armed forces—there are about 215,000 people in the armed forces in total. That should not surprise us, as 39 per cent. of the defence budget is spent on equipment and 29 per cent. on service personnel. Those percentages back up the relative importance of the defence industrial base.

For those companies to flourish, it is essential for the Ministry of Defence to take account of the direct and indirect effects of its massive purchasing decisions on British companies. I would not express it quite as crudely as the hon. Member for Warley, West did by saying that we should always buy British or always try to. It is more complicated than that, as the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East made clear.

The maintenance of the industrial base is not only in the interests of the companies and industries involved, but in the interests of our defence. We are not asking the RAF or anyone else in the armed forces to accept lower standards of equipment or safety. The equipment produced by British companies is of as high a standard as any in the world, but we also know that we can rely on our companies.

During the Gulf war, it was interesting to note how many civilian personnel went out to help back up the armed forces in the field. We have not always been able to rely on defence equipment bought from other countries—a serious incident involving ammunition occurred in the middle of the Falklands war. The more general point is that, unless British industry—both the defence sectors and other sectors—prospers, we shall be unable to afford the defence that we should have and that we wish to have. The health of industry in general provides important underpinning for this country's defence.

I know that some people, particularly some Opposition Members, are embarrassed that our export effort and employment depend to such a large degree on the building of defence equipment. That has led people to think up the ridiculous idea of a defence industry diversification agency. The idea that a Government agency should help defence companies turn over to civilian production does not bear examination, and I am glad that the idea has not been repeated this afternoon. I have lost track of where the idea has got to within the hierarchy of defence thinking among Labour Members—perhaps I am about to find out.

Mr. Frank Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to comment on his last assertion. The assumption that Labour Members are opposed to export sales of arms per se is misleading. Labour Members oppose the export of arms to regimes that will use them for suppression and repression—that is the point.

Sir John Cope: There are two separate arguments—I accept what the hon. Gentleman said. Of course, we can disagree about the particular regimes in question and the particular sales that are made, or are likely to be made, to them. However, some Opposition Members—I acquit the hon. Gentleman of this charge—seem less keen for us to be in the defence production business at all. That must be true; otherwise, what would be the point of a defence industry diversification agency?

The idea that some such agency could tell British Aerospace in my constituency or Rolls-Royce, which also affects my constituency, how the defence sections of their business could be switched over to peaceful activity is ridiculous. British Aerospace is already among the world's leading suppliers of airliners—particularly through its European connections and the airbus. Rolls-Royce is one of the world's leading aero-engine suppliers to both civilian and military aircraft. The idea that an agency could tell those businesses how to sell more civilian aircraft or aero-engines is ridiculous.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I shall have the pleasure and honour of visiting Rolls-Royce in Bristol next Monday. The last thing I shall be telling it is to diversify in the way that the right hon. Gentleman suggested. I am sure that he would agree that defence diversification in this country and others does not involve telling industry what to do. Because of the way in which the world has changed in the past few years, industry is looking for other ways to develop its skills and potential—there is nothing wrong with that.

Sir John Cope: I am all for that. I am happy that the two companies that I mentioned, and many others, are extremely active in civilian as well as military markets. The idea on which I was pouring cold water was that a Government agency could push them from the one to the other.

I shall return to the main points that I wish to make in support of the defence industrial base. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will have to give close attention to the three forthcoming purchases for which bids have been submitted. It is important to consider the British content of those bids not only in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality.

The bids are made to look as British as possible: all the literature that has poured in to us recently has been covered in Union Jacks and has contained great lists of subcontractors in every possible constituency. All those

bidding do their best to demonstrate that they are the most British. But what matters is the quality of the contribution, not merely the quantity or percentage of the contribution.

Therefore, although I entirely accept the difficulty that Back Benchers face when judging competing bids objectively, I think that British Aerospace makes an exceedingly good point when it draws attention to its prime contractorship in the three bids in which it is principally involved—the maritime patrol aircraft, the stand-off missile and the air-launched anti-armour missile. In all cases, it is necessary to look extremely carefully at the quality of the contributions in the bids of all the companies when deciding between them—I appreciate that it is always an extremely difficult choice.

The decision by my hon. Friend the Minister of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have great significance for the future of those sections of British industry and for potential exports. They should give the closest possible attention to that aspect of the purchasing decision.

I agree with some of what the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, who sits on the Liberal Benches, seemed to say at the end of his remarks about Europe. In looking at the three purchasing decisions, I believe that there is sometimes a danger in becoming too involved with the American, as opposed to the European, contractors. The base from which the American contractors operate is massive. It is backed by massive Government research—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and in other ways—and, of course, it has the benefit of a huge home market.

Mr. Wilkinson: Could not the converse equally be true? Participation in American programmes, for the benefit of our armed forces, to meet a British need, gives British industry an incomparable opportunity to maximise its participation over large production runs, especially in the export markets, to meet American requirements. Dowty in Cheltenham is building the propellers for the C130J, and there is a huge benefit. The same could apply if that propeller was chosen for the Orion 2000.

Sir John Cope: I do not argue that it is wrong in every case or that there are no advantages in co-operating with the Americans, but the fact is that the United States is extremely reluctant to export any of its technology. One is not dealing with an equal partner when one takes on a partnership with the United States; whereas one tends to deal more with equal partners in the deals that are put together in Europe.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. Friend should remember, when speaking on behalf of British Aerospace, that the collaboration and co-operation on the present generation of modern Harrier aircraft is an example of American and United Kingdom co-operation.

Sir John Cope: Of course, and that is one of the reasons why the AV8B has been extremely important to my constituency, among other things. That is one of the reasons why I am not putting it in absolute terms. Nevertheless, I still believe that we should look to increase European co-operation when we can.

Part of the reason why we joined the European Community in the first place was to increase the size of our home market as the base from which to do business with the rest of the world. We sometimes forget that nowadays, when looking at the statistics of trade within Europe. I do not and would not suggest that the European Union is the base from which we should do business in relation to defence. Clearly, the Western European Union is the right body from that point of view. The EU contains some countries that are neutral—why should they not be neutral if they so wish?—and that makes it a different organisation.

One of the areas of least co-operation in the WEU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is in deciding the specification for defence products. Now that there is new vigour in achieving WEU co-operation, more attention should be given to trying to agree the specifications for defence products. Again, that is not a universal point—before any of my hon. Friends intervenes again. I recognise that the Eurofighter is an example of specific agreement on the specification, and the future large aircraft is another, to a degree, but such examples are relatively limited. I gather that our requirements and those of the French on the stand-off missile are similar, but they are not the same at this point. The two Governments and Air Forces are trying to combine, as was done in the case of Eurofighter, where a limited number of countries worked together.

My general point is that companies work right across Europe—

Mr. Wilkinson: The world.

Sir John Cope: And the world. They need to do so. The Governments and air forces are showing that they need to get their specifications closer together, as much as they possibly can. More attention should be given to that aspect of future planning for defence procurement.

6.45 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) criticised the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), the Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, for having made a fairly thin speech. I think that those were the words. *[Interruption.]* I accept the correction, but I take issue with the comment anyway, because if one measures one performance against the other, frankly there is no competition.

Our pattern of debates on defence issues must be renewed and reconsidered. We currently have a one-day debate each year on each of the three services, followed by a two-day thrash on the defence estimates. We do not get to grips with it. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces has, on more than one occasion this evening, both in his speech and in interventions, stressed the importance of the joint command, joint training and the joint control centre. As we are moving into a joint force activity, especially with the combined joint task force, we should debate defence issues in a less compartmentalised way.

I appeal to both Front Benches to get together, please, and review the approach for next year, because if they do not, they will have to the year after, as that is the way in which we are going, and it makes sense to look at it in that way.

[Mr. Frank Cook]

We have heard much about EFA, CASOMs and SWAARMs—all the acronyms that we are pleased—

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: By all means.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am sorry to interrupt what will clearly be an interesting speech, but the problem with having a day to debate procurement and then, perhaps, an extra day to debate the armed forces, is that we would lose a day's debate on the armed services. I do not think that anybody would wish to see that.

Mr. Cook: I am asking for a review. I do not want the Minister to have to find the answer this evening. Let us just talk about it through the usual channels before next time. If both Front Benches do not review it next time, they will have to do it the time after that. That is my point.

Let us return to the acrimonious acronyms. I heard a complaint from the Liberal Democrat spokesman, who said, "I don't know how long I'm going to be, as I have to cover so many subjects." I think that that is a fault, and I shall not fall into that trap. I want to talk about just one topic in essence, with a small conclusion later.

I shall concentrate on sustainability because I have seen press reports that have said that it is one of the main anxieties of Sir Peter Inge, the Chief of the Defence Staff. I was puzzled by that, so when I attended the plenary session of the North Atlantic Assembly in Athens a couple of weeks ago, I took the opportunity to nobble—I do not know whether it is spelt with a k—Sir Peter at an evening reception at the ambassador's residence, to ask him what he meant.

Sir Peter was very helpful and he said that he thought that our draw-down was at about the right level, that he was satisfied with manning levels and with the equipment that was available, and that we had it about right for now. He said that he was worried about sustainability. I asked him what he meant, and he referred to the number of personnel that we currently have in Northern Ireland—and we intend to maintain that number until we get some sort of a guarantee of a lasting improvement in that awkward climate.

We also talked about our commitments elsewhere in the world. Sir Peter is proud of the fact that 12,000 United Kingdom military personnel are taking part in exercises in the United States. We apparently knocked America for six because they did not think that we were capable of providing a force of that size. That is good—as long as we stay where we are.

The Defence Select Committee recently released a report on what we call overstretch in the military. We heard a considerable amount of evidence, and two days before we published the report, we got the famous add-back. It seems that, even at this stage, add-back is proving hardly sufficient. When we visit units, we get reports not just from rankers, but from senior NCOs and the commissioned ranks, that personnel are being pushed to the limit.

Some weeks ago, we visited a type 23—HMS Lancaster in the Irish sea—and we were told by the senior warrant officers, by commissioned ranks and by the stokers that working 17 hours a day, seven days a week, even on a home base, was a regular thing. While there was decent morale in terms of esprit de corps and confidence in one's workmate—one's marra—there was considerable dissatisfaction on the home front because it was thought to be unnecessary in those situations.

I was further disturbed when I visited RAF Marham—similar criticisms were commonplace. That is not the result of a lack of morale or a lack of commitment; the individuals, in all three forces, give their best—more than their best—at all times. How long can we expect that to be sustained? Today we are talking about the Royal Air Force, so I shall keep my comments specific to it. I have mentioned RAF Marham, where we found criticisms about duty hours, guards and the like.

I refer to the Charlie 130s—the famous Hercules that are operating in the Falkland Islands—which are used for refuelling purposes. Some people have said that the Charlie 130s are the result of lash-ups that were designed on the back of a fag packet. They are somewhat Heath Robinson in appearance, they are single-skinned, they have unarmoured flexi-pipes and they are a serious source of risk. They need to be replaced, as they have been working there for an awful long time. I remind hon. Members that the subject of my speech is sustainability. They are sustaining themselves at the moment—but how long can we expect them to do so?

Our visit to Yeovilton allowed us to learn from squadrons 800 and 801, which had been flying Harriers on a six-month-on, six-month-off, basis with the Invincible and the Illustrious in the Adriatic. There was an admission that there were degrees of jading, if not with the aircrews, certainly with the aircraft. We have heard comments from the Chairman of the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), about rolling robbing in the RAF. How long can we allow it to go on?

Most embarrassing of all was when the Defence Select Committee visited Bosnia—I can see smiles on the faces of Government Members; in a way it was humorous, but it could have been somewhat less humorous. We relied on the famous Chinooks, which had undergone their mid-life update. The commanding officer was proud of them, to the point that he said that they were infinitely better than anything that could be produced from the EH101 as a replacement.

We got into the first Chinook and flew about 15 miles before we had to return to transfer to another Chinook. It got us about the country for the next day and a half until, when we sought to depart from the American garrison at Tuzla, it refused even to cough into action. We were rescued by the United States cavalry in the shape of two Black Hawks, and we got back to Split for our connection a great deal faster than we would have done in the Chinook.

The point I am making is simple: how long can we expect equipment and people who are under pressure to carry on? There is not a lack of commitment on the part of those who maintain the equipment, there is not a lack of courage on the part of those who operate it and there is not a lack of dedication. I refer to the case of Corporal Wayne Mills—the first recipient of the conspicuous gallantry medal. He won the medal in Gorazde some time ago, for behaving in a particularly exemplary way in

protecting his section of eight men when they encountered a numerically superior force of Serbs who were somewhat undisciplined and probably inebriate.

Wayne Mills defended his lads by telling them to leg it for safety and creating a one-man ambush. Wayne Mills, in characteristic British understatement—note that I said British—said that the whole thing was more to do with breathlessness than with bravery. In other words, the lad probably could not have run any further, but he still had the guts to create a one-man ambush out of his own ability.

I am talking about sustainability. They will turn it on in all three forces. Why? Because they take pride in the fact that all three forces are can-do forces, because we, as politicians, send them out to do a job, because that is why they joined the forces and because that is what they are paid to do. It is our responsibility to ensure that, when we send them out to do the job, they have the wherewithal with which to do it. It is as easy as that. A few Government Members are smirking. I am not telling them what I think; I am telling them what Sir Peter Inge, the Chief of the Defence Staff, is anxious about. If he is worried about it, by God, we should be worried about it, too.

Let us not plead breathlessness at a late stage. Corporal Mills did not plead breathlessness. He was a very brave man; they were all brave in that unit, regardless of whether they received awards. I say that with pride, because my son was with them and received a commendation.

Lastly, I wish to discuss the suggested sale of married quarters. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East described the reaction to the suggestion in the services as apprehension. That is the wrong word. I tell the Minister of State for Defence Procurement: the right word is anger—downright anger; anger at lack of consultation, anger at an unheeding response, anger at the risk to which those people feel they will be put.

I add my support to the idea that the current voids should be put on the open market. I believe that 10,000 or 11,000 voids would be snapped up at £10,000 apiece. I add another suggestion. Many local authorities have written to the Government, pleading for the move to be stopped because they want the opportunity to take those properties into their housing stock. If those local authorities were allowed to put to use some of the assets that have accrued as a result of the sale of council housing, the MOD's problem could be resolved a great deal more rapidly than it previously supposed.

If that cannot be the case, I say to the Minister, "Take your current idea of selling married quarters on the open market and dump it; forget it altogether."

7.1 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I shall begin with a comment and follow it up briefly with a quotation. In comments attributed to Field-Marshal Earl Haig after the first world war, he said that, looking back on that horrendous conflict, to him two things were of importance—barbed wire and Trenchard. Barbed wire we can all understand—there are memorials to it throughout the length and breadth of Picardy, Flanders and the Gallipoli peninsula—but Trenchard? We are debating his memorial tonight. He was of course the commander of the first independent air force in 1918.

Earl Haig, being unable to carry the war to Germany itself, had alongside him in the headquarters at Nancy, further down the front, in Trenchard, the architect of independent air power and, night after night in the concluding months and weeks of the war, the independent air force struck into Germany—Mannheim, Stuttgart, the Ruhr and so on.

Trenchard came to be Chief of Air Staff and, when the great demobilisation began after the great war, he found himself trying to keep the air force in being. He wrote a memorandum to the then Secretary of State for Air—and War, actually—Sir Winston Churchill, the grandfather of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I regret that my hon. Friend is not here. Sir Winston presented the memorandum to the House in the form of a White Paper on 11 December 1919. It said:

"The force may in fact be compared to the prophet Jonah's gourd. The necessities of war created it in a night, but the economics of peace have to a large extent caused it to wither in a day, and we are now faced with the necessity of replacing it with a plant of deeper root.

As in nature, however, decay fosters growth, and the new plant has a fruitful soil in which to spring."

We have the economics of peace with a vengeance today, and the Royal Air Force has gone through the turmoil of readjustment, not least many families whose breadwinner probably aspired to a lifelong career of service in the Royal Air Force and found himself prematurely not wanted; but now we have an opportunity to nurture the service and to create the political environment to establish a Royal Air Force that will endure as an effective fighting service at least into the first two decades of the next century.

The withdrawal of the RAF from Germany was the culmination of a period of contraction. Many of us had urged that withdrawal long years heretofore, saying that the characteristics of air power did not necessitate a presence of the Royal Air Force, once the Warsaw pact was disbanded, on the soil of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Now, as an island country, we are in a position to create in our Air Force a powerful instrument to preserve peace in a very uncertain world. The Air Force has all the attributes that are requisite for the purpose—speed of intervention, flexibility, economy of force, the potential for a minimum risk of casualties, and minimum collateral damage as a result of the application of precision munitions.

Let us first consider what Trenchard regarded as most important—the men and women of the service. What will they most require, now and tomorrow? Above all, I would say discipline—discipline, and again discipline, and yet again discipline. Nothing is more fundamental for a fighting service. Therefore, the whole training programme, the development of commissioned and non-commissioned personnel throughout their service career, should re-emphasise that cardinal point.

The profession of arms calls for unnatural qualities of sacrifice and dedication, so the inculcation of qualities of character and devotion from the earliest years is crucial. That is why Trenchard founded Royal Air Force college Cranwell and the apprentice school at Halton, among other things, and they stood the service well and proved themselves in war and peace, and enabled the service to endure and to be one of which we are justly proud.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

With discipline must come education and training, both technical and physical; that is why I query what I would call the blazer and flannels ethos in the flying training schools. The Assistant Chief of Air Staff, in the session with the Select Committee on Defence, rightly said that it was his hope that a high proportion of qualified flying instructors would be reservists and therefore able to wear uniform.

I endorse him wholeheartedly. I think they all should be, and the great opportunity of the sponsored reserve category which we have created with our Reserve Forces Bill is that it enables contractorisation to be compatible with the exigencies of military service, with the requirement to serve anywhere at any time at the behest of the Crown in the defence of the realm.

I mentioned the blazer and flannels ethos with regard to the air crew, but it applies equally to the ground crew. My hon. Friend the Minister of State mentioned what is happening at RAF Valley. It comprises an advanced flying training school and a tactical weapons unit, which is supposedly a reserve squadron that can be mobilised rapidly in times of emergency or war.

If the Brown and Root and Marshall personnel are sent from Anglesey overseas at short notice into an inhospitable theatre, unless they are auxiliaries and have signed the Air Force Act 1955, I suppose that they could refuse to go. That could cause complications. It is why I urge Her Majesty's Government to make full use of the sponsored reserve's potential in that way.

We must achieve a balance between the Regulars and the reservists. The problem in recent years is that the balance has favoured the Regulars, and the potential of the reservists has never been adequately realised. I hope that this situation will be put right. The signs are good in that regard. For example, the No.1 maritime headquarters unit at RAF Northolt in my constituency does a first-class job supporting the naval headquarters at Northwood and the 11/18 group RAF headquarters at Bentley Priory. The support helicopter squadron at Benson is a precursor of things to come.

I recall another Trenchardism. In response to his suggestion about establishing the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, Churchill replied, "Weekend squadrons, Boom? Never." Of course, those weekend squadrons were formed, and they achieved a third of the victories in the battle of Britain. That battle could not have been won without them, any more than it could have been won without the Poles, whose memorial stands at the threshold of my constituency. Their No. 303 squadron, which operated out of RAF Northolt in my constituency, shot down more enemy aircraft in the battle than any other squadron, even though it was not officially operational when it plunged into the fray.

When considering the force structure in personnel terms, we must address also the equipment issue. I am pleased that the "Front Line First" exercise has enabled the Government to find extra money for equipment. If the Air Force is small in size, it must be equipped to the very highest standard. I am thrilled that the C130J has been introduced into service. The companies which are participating in the programme will benefit from the operational and industrial potential that it presents.

As to the future transport force, it will need a strategic lifter. If we operate primarily from this island—we will have no overseas commands or groups, and few overseas bases—and if we are to project power, we will need an aircraft that can carry a large volume. That is why I advocate the C17 as a complement to the C130Js in the next century. There must be a mix of those aircraft.

As an island nation, we must concentrate on our maritime role. It is pointless looking to aircraft that are near the end of their useful lives or to hand-me-downs out of the desert: we must buy new aeroplanes that offer the very best in technology, good industrial participation for the United Kingdom and export potential for companies involved in the programme well into the next century, as well as a commonality with other allied air forces and navies that operate the P3.

The argument is fairly straightforward. I recall the VC10 tanker conversion programme. The refurbishment of those aircraft proved extremely costly, and there were hideous problems. With hindsight, it was probably not a very wise decision. Let us not make the same mistake again.

I make no comment about the weaponry—the AST1236 and 1238 or the advanced stand-off radar—except to say that the Royal Air Force must always be ready to buy the best equipment from any source. We must not have political preconceptions. We must not allow our participation in the European Armaments Agency or any other rationale to lead us to buy equipment that does not best meet the RAF's needs. Cost-effectiveness must be the criterion.

For example, the lesson to be learned from the European fighter aircraft 2000 is not that it will not meet the requirements—it probably will—but that an agency and superfluity of management, with a capital "M", is not what is required, as much as a commercial orientation to drive the programme forward, maximise profits for the participants and lead to the aircraft's early entry into service for the RAF.

In conclusion, I shall raise a subject to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State alluded in his speech. The sole No. 11 Group sector station of the battle of Britain—RAF Northolt—is situated in my constituency. It was founded as a Royal Flying Corps station in 1915, so it must be almost the oldest station in the country. The Transport Committee has suggested that it should no longer be a Royal Air Force station, but should become a civil satellite airport—Heathrow north, no less. It is proposed that the Royal Air Force be allowed to make requests from time to time regarding military movements.

The Royal Squadron No. 32 meets the communications flying requirements for the royal family and Her Majesty's Ministers, as well as for the permanent joint headquarters at Northwood, headquarters fleet at Northwood, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation 1 East Atlantic headquarters at Northwood, Royal Air Force headquarters at Bentley Priory at Stanmore, the No. 11/18 group, the headquarters of RAF Strike Command at High Wycombe, the new NATO Command North-West Europe, which is also at High Wycombe, and diplomatic, and for highly sensitive Government movements of all sorts. To fulfil those roles—which are crucial in times of peace, emergency and war—a discrete dedicated facility is required. That role would not be compatible with reverting RAF Northolt to the status of a civil airport, which it became very briefly following world war 2.

Residential development around Northolt has increased enormously since those early post-war years, and the Royal Air Force and the civil community enjoy a very satisfactory relationship. The civil executive jet fraternity are allowed to use the airport for a maximum of 28 movements a day with prior permission, five days a week from 08.00 to 20.00 hours. That is perfectly acceptable. If it were turned into a civil airport, it would prejudice one of the Royal Air Force's key roles, and I hope that it will not happen.

7.18 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall follow up several points raised by the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). First, I was particularly interested in his comments about training. I recall suggesting in debate two or three years ago that elementary flying training within the service was not simply about teaching people how to fly: it was about teaching people to fly into very hostile environments. The traditions, record and indoctrination that are necessary parts of military training confirm the hon. Gentleman's argument.

As to the reserve service, I hope that civilian instructors—who may not have received the same training as the hon. Gentleman and one or two other Conservative Members—will not become reservists as an excuse for administrative convenience.

The hon. Gentleman rightly paid tribute to the Auxiliary Air Force. He will also acknowledge that the sergeant pilots of the Volunteer Reserve made what was perhaps a greater contribution in Fighter Command during the second world war.

I wish, however, that he had continued his historical analysis. There were those who would have threatened the independence of the Royal Air Force, but Trenchard convinced them that the RAF could police the empire very cheaply, and that it would be cheaper to have a few squadrons of biplanes patrolling Kurdistan or the Himalayan areas of the Indian subcontinent than to have large numbers of infantry—whether British or imperial troops—stationed there.

Without that, it is unlikely that the Air Force would have survived the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s. However, it did, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, we now have the oldest independent air force in the world. It is one of enormously high quality, to which the rest of the world looks with admiration. Is standing is probably higher abroad than it is in England. One reason for that was that, until the Minister's speech this afternoon, Government tributes to the Air Force over recent years have been somewhat grudging.

Although the debate so far has been forward-looking, we have all referred to the mistake that was made five or six years ago at the end of the cold war. All Governments in the west, including ours, reached out to grab the peace dividend because they thought that it meant there would be peace. Certainly, once the iron curtain had fallen and the Warsaw pact had disintegrated, there was no prospect of huge armies surging across the north German plain, the response to which was the Royal Air Force's principal obligation for most of the post-war period.

However, the end of the cold war and the grasping of the peace dividend was followed by an extremely large number of new commitments that presented new problems, anxieties and costs that may not have been anticipated. Ten years ago, the Royal Air Force had far fewer commitments than those to which a response has been given in the past 12 months.

The RAF has been operating in more locations during the past 12 months than it did at the height of the cold war. The Minister said that they were low-key commitments, and perhaps they were. They may also have been a great deal less comfortable and hospitable than those to which the service was accustomed during the cold war. Shrinking numbers of aircraft, squadrons and personnel have had to bear an increased burden.

It is all very well for the Minister to pay tribute to the RAF, and I welcome that, but the fact remains that the air crew, and the ground engineers and communication people who travel with them, spend an inordinate amount of time away from base and their wives and families. Recently, I saw a squadron diary showing how many weeks in the year the pilots, engineers and communication personnel spent away from base. It is not fair.

It is all very well to pay tribute to them for their dedication, but they pay a bitter price. It may be that the price they have paid is the reason why a substantial proportion of quite senior officers find it necessary to leave. The Air Force has lost some excellent people in the past few years, and we should ask why.

We are asking too much—not of them, as they are professionals, but of their families. They tend to be family men. The public image of an RAF pilot is a fresh-faced 19-year-old, but he is probably in his 30s, married with 2.1 children, and he likes to see his wife and children occasionally. More importantly, they want to see him. I trust that we will see a more positive and healthy approach from the Government.

Over the past few years, the Government have taken the lead in Europe's response to crisis. Perhaps they feel that, as a member of United Nations Security Council, we have to take the lead in accepting obligations and commitments although other wealthier members of the western alliance in Europe have been slow to offer a meaningful response. Perhaps they are incapable of offering one. If we are to accept those commitments, we have to speak a little more bluntly to some of our European colleagues about fair deals.

The hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood has joined us on the delegation to the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. He may recall the meeting at Church house a few months ago when we were discussing the future organisation of security in Europe. A number of delegations from other countries—left, right and centre politically—spoke about the need for adequate logistics, training and police and medical staff. I moved an amendment stating that, if they planned to discuss proper commitments and undertakings, they would have to have people capable of firing guns and serving at the sharp end of conflict. The amendment was defeated.

Our allies are quite happy for Britain to provide a large proportion of the troops currently serving in Bosnia. The hon. Gentleman may recall that, in April, when we were in Strasbourg, it was proposed that the IFOR troops should remain in Bosnia a great deal longer. I was asked to move a amendment to that effect, but the people who asked me to do so represented countries that had no personnel there.

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

I asked why I should expect my constituents to serve in Bosnia and expect Britain to provide a quarter of NATO troops, when they were not sending anyone at all. "We are behind you," they said. "Yes, I have noticed that," I replied, "and I shall not move the amendment." I did not do so. However, we may have to accept there will be an extension. That will give the British Government an opportunity to speak bluntly, but unfortunately they are not doing so.

On Monday, the Secretary of State for Defence addressed the WEU assembly in Paris. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who has replaced me as leader of the Labour delegation because I retire at the next election, has persistently followed up the argument that I had been advancing for some years—along with hon. Members on both sides of the House—about breaches of sanctions in the former Yugoslavia.

About four years ago, the Italian Minister told a Conservative Member and me that the Council of Ministers had all the information about breaches of sanctions, but would not tells us, or do anything about them. My hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill has taken over that initiative, but we still have not learnt anything more. He raised the matter with the Secretary of State for Defence, who unfortunately is not here, but no doubt will hear about it later.

When he was asked why the Foreign Office or the Ministry of Defence had not replied to my hon. Friend's persistent pursuit of the matter, the Secretary of State's response in Paris was to blame the nationalised British Post Office. That is hardly the mature comment that one would have expected from him in such an environment.

I also endorse the point raised by the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood about the future equipment of the service being of the highest quality. We give our service men inordinately heavy tasks, and we ask a great deal of them. It is essential that they have the proper equipment. Much of the equipment is British or part-British, and it is superb, but the Air Force should not be seen merely as a customer.

If it is to be a customer, however, privatisation should not be taken so far that the Air Force lacks the capacity to be an intelligence customer. Last year, I asked the Minister to ensure that the Air Force retained sufficient capacity in its operations to be able to judge whether the taxpayer was getting a good bargain and to perceive whether the contractor was providing adequately for training—an important matter, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I have a number of questions. I do not want to speak too long, but may I ask the Minister, in his reply to the debate, not to overlook the future large aircraft. I went to a briefing across the road attended by other hon. Members, where the French advised us that it was our duty to buy the FLA. The committee of the WEU on which I serve went to Toulouse, where we were given a programme and a timetable for the development of the FLA. I made the following remark: "Your timetable shows the FLA entering Royal Air Force squadron service 18 months before it has its maiden flight." Their response was, "We do a great deal by simulators nowadays."

The fact remains that we were properly committed to replacing, as was necessary, at the earliest possible stage, the older Hercules with the C130J. I spoke strongly in favour of that partial replacement, but the Government hit on what seemed a satisfactory compromise by replacing the older Hercules with the FLA.

Where, however, are we going now? Chirac seems likely to cancel the FLA. If we had done what the French had wanted, we would not have the C130Js, but would be waiting for the FLAs, which, even if they did replace the Hercules squadrons at Lyneham, would not do so for another 10 years. Meanwhile, the Hercules, which entered squadron service in 1964, bringing Britain back from its east of Suez policy, would have continued to serve long after it had reached its sell-by date.

I hope that the FLA will fly and that the Royal Air Force will be able to use it, but, even if it does, what will the Minister do about adequate heavy-lift capacity? What is going to lift the helicopters and all their appurtenances, which will be required in future regions of conflict in Africa, Europe, Montserrat or wherever the Minister may guess they might be? The Air Force will have to have such capacity. Europe may not be able to provide it, but it can provide the replacement air-to-air refuelling aircraft. There is no reason why the airbus could not be reasonably and economically converted to serve that purpose to replace the tankers currently in use by the air force.

I give this advice to the Minister. A year or so ago, I conducted—imperfectly, because, for one reason, of delays in some member states' response—an analysis of the capabilities of western European air forces. I found, for example, that the vast majority of western European air forces had no experience or ability in air-to-air refuelling, a singular omission; that many air forces had no all-weather-strike capacity, which is not acceptable if Europe is to provide properly for its security; that their capacity to undertake intelligence gathering and reconnaissance operations of the sort that the Sentry and Nimrod undertake was, in most cases, non-existent; that some of their pilots fly only when the weather is fine, during the day, perhaps after a good lunch; and that there is an inordinate number of different types of aircraft.

As ours is the most admired service, as we bear most of the burdens and as we serve as the model for and are admired by Europe—as the Minister has said, people come rushing from Europe to see how our contracting and hard-pressed service is operating—we are entitled to say, "Don't expect Britain to continue to bear burdens that you must share more frequently than you are doing at present."

If we do not say that, it will be unfair on the air crews and ground staff who serve them, who know very well that that is the position, but who are too discreet and too loyal to say it. We are imposing too much on them, which is not fair. It is time that the Government sought to ensure a much fairer deal in the responsibilities for air operations in the western alliance. Until that is achieved, we are entitled to feel aggrieved.

May I make one mischievous suggestion? The Government's current position with regard to Brussels and European negotiations is absurd. It is equivalent to a child taking its bat home because someone has bowled him out. However, I have sympathy with Conservative Members who think that we should show some criticism of the fact that one or two member states have been less helpful than they might have been; perhaps Germany is one of them.

As a tribute to the enormous sacrifices that were made in the history of the oldest independent air force in the world, and as a little reminder of the genuine independence that Britain displayed between 1940 and 1944, why not give Bomber Command the medal that it should have received after the second world war? Go back to negotiations, but make a little gesture. It would be much more sensible.

7.34 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). No one can deny that, in relation to the Royal Air Force, his heart and mind are in the right place, and we always welcome his contribution to the debates.

I remind the House that I have an interest. For many years, I have been a volunteer reserve pilot and instructor and I hold an honorary appointment. I have been thinking about the debate for some weeks, wondering what we would be talking about. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and I must have been thinking about similar things because I had begun to think about the period between the wars and how Lord Trenchard had laid down the foundations that led to the expansion in the late 1930s.

The lessons of the second world war are that control of the skies is a necessary objective. Who could ever forget the sinking of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, two capital ships that were lost because they had no air cover? The absence of air cover was critical and the lesson was brought home to us, if we needed it, that even men-of-war that were thought to be invincible were vulnerable to air attack. Who can ever forget the battle of Britain, a close-run thing? I could go on and on about that period, but I have made my point. We must therefore consider today's Royal Air Force against the evidence of history.

If we are to continue to have the broad range of capability, which is the task that Parliament has required the RAF to meet, again history will assist us. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood probably, I have been re-reading some books about the pre-war RAF and about the battle of Britain. Like most people of my generation, I have a library of such books and from time to time I return to them. Having read them, I asked myself: do we today have the ability to expand within, say, three years to defend United Kingdom air space against aggression from the continent?

People will say, "Who are the enemies?" but I remind them that in 1930 no one had heard of Hitler and, by 1940, in 10 short years, he had created the most massive military force known to man and had occupied most of Europe. In fact, in 1932, no one had heard of him. I pick on three years deliberately because the years 1936-39 were critical for the RAF and the year 1939-40 was vital to our survival.

So I ask the question: do we have the capacity to create a strike force capable of taking modern weapons deep into enemy territory? Could we create a modern equivalent of Bomber Harris's Bomber Command? Do we have the capacity today to create a transport and maritime capability, the modern equivalent of Transport and Coastal Command? More important probably, do we have a logistics and training capability to meet the demands of supplying front-line expansion capabilities? My concern is primarily directed towards our ability to expand logistics and training. If we fail in either or both of those sectors, front-line expansion will not take place.

My reading of the expansion years of the late 1930s is that the ability to produce and to maintain aircraft and spares was vital. Attrition losses in the early years of the war, particularly in France in the first year, required new equipment quickly and squadrons to be created to meet the demands of defending the skies of the United Kingdom.

Will one fast-jet training unit be capable of turning out the number of aircrew required if expansion is necessary in the circumstances that may evolve? The hon. Member for Wentworth and others reminded the House that the unexpected always happens. Will we have the capacity to train sufficient technical staff for the extra squadrons? I can envisage the Royal Air Force having the aircraft but empty seats, because it will be incapable of producing the required number of fast-jet pilots in time.

The present Chief of Air Staff and the Air Force Board are to be congratulated on following the example of Trenchard and learning the lessons of the pre-war years. I am sure that the present Chief of Air Staff would be the first to admit that there must be some risk in the way that financial pressures have forced the RAF to produce training structure logistics that may not expand as the service would wish in times of emergency.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) used the word "sustainability", and the combination of that in current circumstances with the ability to expand will ultimately determine whether or not policies decided and decisions taken now were wise. I heard that with some feeling because we often hear from people—sadly, some of them on the Opposition Benches—the nonsense that a defence review will solve the problem. All experience of such reviews is that they are designed to save money. If we are creating structures that are the direct result of financial pressures—the so-called peace dividend—heaven help us if we go down the route of a defence review designed to save more money, because that will mean cutting planned defence procurement. That is the only way to produce quick savings.

I am pleased with the actions of my hon. Friends the Ministers in respect of defence procurement. I welcome the upgrading of the Tornado F3, which was a wise and sensible decision that had the added advantage of protecting the vital Eurofighter 2000 programme, which we must do nothing to undermine. We are depending on that aircraft, and on it coming in on time. Can my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement give an assurance that decisions on the following programmes will be announced before the summer recess? *[Interruption.]* I pause while my hon. Friends have their collaborative chat, and I am happy that they should chat. The programmes to which I refer are the replacement maritime patrol aircraft, SR1236—the CASOM, and the SR1238 anti-armour weapon. May we expect decisions before the recess?

The first duty is to buy the maritime patrol aircraft that is right for the job. The second is to get it at the best possible competitive price—I do not argue with that. We must also consider UK involvement. Collaboration is a fact of life and not something that one can discard. In military aviation manufacturing, collaboration is not an option. No single company or country can today provide the high-cost, leading-edge, sophisticated and modern military equipment required to give our air force the edge that it needs. Purchasing decisions cannot ignore that factor. It is important to consider not only price but work

[Mr. Bill Walker]

share, future capability, the retention of a UK research and development and manufacturing capability, and the vital export potential and through-life costs.

It is nonsense for Members of Parliament and the Government to spend taxpayers' money on something that will not offer export potential. That is where collaboration is vital and important. Are we collaborating with countries whose markets will be open to us, or not? I commend my hon. Friends on the selection of the C130J, which was the right decision, as subsequent events have shown, because one should not be persuaded to buy a paper or political aircraft—aircrew do not like the idea of flying, either.

Whatever the pressure on my hon. Friend the Minister—and it will be huge—he should bear it in mind that the companies involved in all the runners for the maritime replacement aircraft should have a large UK content. It is also nonsense to say that, because a company is a leading fuselage manufacturer, it is the only choice—it is not. I hope that the replacement's specification and price will be carefully examined and that the RAF will get the right aircraft, which will have implications for sales world wide. Also, can my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary give some idea when a decision on procuring the SRA1239 is likely to be made?

People tend to think of the Royal Air Force in terms of fast, noisy, low-flying jets. Sadly, that is often the only evidence the public have of an RAF presence. With that in mind, I congratulate my hon. Friends on sanctioning and agreeing the successful Red Arrows tour of the far east, which was one of the most valuable exercises in many decades. It had a huge impact and did enormous good for UK export potential.

Opposition Members mentioned the time that individuals must be away from their home base as a result of the overstretch faced in some areas—a critical factor in maintaining morale and professional standards at home and abroad. We should not be surprised if people have domestic problems if we continue to require them to be away for six months of each year.

Housing is another matter of concern, and answers can and should be found. It is important that we communicate effectively to the people who are affected so that they can clearly receive the message and understand what is happening. I believe that those at the highest levels of the RAF understand what the Government are trying to do, but I am not sure that people at the lower levels understand.

I welcome today's announcement on the RAF Valley contract. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood in suggesting that there should be a pilot scheme for sponsored reserves. I believe that sponsored reserves is the way to go forward. As a volunteer myself, I have always felt that the volunteers' value was not always properly understood by the Government or by the services. Given the opportunity and the training, volunteers are as professional as full-time people. The RAF Valley contract should be a good way to get the sponsored reserves moving.

I cannot forget that, in the immediate post-war years, people such as those from Airwork manned the reserve flying schools, with which I was associated. All the people from Airwork at those flying schools were reservists. Those were the days when the volunteer reserve was a very large organisation. I should like to see those manning levels restored through the auxiliaries. I therefore welcome the decision on the helicopter composite squadron at Benson, which is a move in the right direction.

I should now like to turn to a topic that is very close and dear to me. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will not be surprised to hear that I am going to mention something that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces did not mention in opening the debate—the cadets. The Air Training Corps, which currently has 37,000 cadets, not only provides training in citizenship, leadership, team work and many other attributes sought by potential employers; it also remains a valuable source of recruits for the RAF.

Recruiting is not one of the ATC's main objectives, but it is worth noting that the cadets who join the RAF not only have a lower wastage rate in training but remain in the service longer than those without Air Training Corps experience. Moreover, as the RAF significantly decreases its manpower and its geographical spread of bases, the Air Training Corps increasingly represents the only blue RAF uniform that the public ever see.

It is interesting to note that, according to the figures given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, by 1999 the service will be down to 52,200 people. The ATC, including the adults in uniform who are associated with it, will be nearly the same size. We will have a cadet force that is almost equal in size to its parent service. It is therefore important that my hon. Friend the Minister recognises, and agrees, that the air element of the Air Training Corps is the vital feature that distinguishes it from other organised youth activity, and that it is an important way in which to raise the RAF's profile in the public eye.

My hon. Friend the Minister will not be surprised to learn that I want to draw attention to volunteer gliding schools. There are problems with those because sites are becoming increasingly difficult to find. As the RAF shrinks and RAF stations decrease in number, we find it difficult to find sufficient sites for our 28 volunteer gliding schools. The situation is particularly difficult in north-east and south-east England. In some places we have entered into shared agreements with the Army and the Navy, by which they have taken over former RAF bases and shared the airfields with us.

I should like to make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that the Army and the Navy must realise that the volunteer reserve gliding units are a part of the RAF training machine, that airfields are for aeroplanes, gliders and other aircraft to fly from and that airfields are not meant for other things. It would be useful if the Army and the Navy—at local level, because there has never been any problem at the highest level—understood that.

I also ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement—I have already written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about this—to understand the need for additional Vigilant motor gliders, which will provide the flexibility that is necessary because of the lack of sites. I do not expect an answer today, but I ask the Minister to have a word with the Secretary of State about my bid for seven more Vigilant motor gliders. They are necessary because of the difficulty with sites.

We have found that fewer summer camp places are now available because of the reduction of RAF stations. It has therefore become increasingly necessary for us to find other ways in which to get the cadets to camp. I should like my hon. Friends the Ministers to realise that that problem must be examined in some depth. There may be new solutions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has a direct interest in air experience flying. We will be considering replacing the Bulldog aircraft, which is used for university air squadron flying and for the air cadet air experience flying. I hope that soon we can receive some answers on the replacement for the Bulldog. If my hon. Friend the Minister accepts—I am sure that he does—that the air element is the important element of the air cadets, Bulldogs and the replacement aircraft are important and should have a fairly high priority. As it is not an expensive project—as are the projects I mentioned earlier—I should think that, even with our tight budgets, we will find ways to replace those aircraft.

I always find it interesting to listen to debates on the RAF because, fortunately, there are still some hon. Members who have direct RAF experience. One of the great tragedies of the modern Parliament is that so few hon. Members who are elected to it now have direct experience of the military. We are blessed to have colleagues with direct experience of the military. We are also blessed to have such hon. Members as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who has a keen and direct interest in the military. The RAF benefits from that.

The message that I should like the House to send out to the people in the RAF is that we care, that they are important and that we want to do the right things for them.

7.57 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who speaks with a very patriotic insight. My speech will be unashamedly constituency-oriented. When I heard the Minister's remarks about Normandy and about those years of crucial importance to the future of our nation, I was reminded that from 1940 the Vickers company built and operated a shadow factory in my constituency, where the Wellington and later the Lancaster bombers were made. My constituents' skills greatly helped the RAF in the war effort.

I will deal first with the future large aircraft. In my constituency, 2,200 plane makers make the wings of the airbus and they also want to make the wings of the FLA. One of the reasons I want them to be able to do so is that, in the past two and a half years, my constituents have lost some 2,000 jobs at Airbus, British Aerospace and Broughton, which has had a great impact on the local economy. If we were to make the wings for the FLA, it would be the icing on the very successful airbus cake. That is our hope and our plea.

The airbus activity is the linchpin of my constituency's economy, but it is also the linchpin of the Wirral area, Cheshire and the city of Chester. The airbus activity has meant that my constituency in north-east Wales has a reservoir of skills arguably unparalleled anywhere else in the country. I should like Ministers to acknowledge that the FLA project is crucial for the future of the whole industry. Do they comprehend the strategic importance of the aerospace industry itself?

I would itemise the industry's importance as follows: it represents sales of £10 billion a year and 2 per cent. of the nation's gross domestic product; three aerospace companies are among Britain's top five exporters; there are some 130,000 employees in this great industry and tens of thousands of people are indirectly employed; the industry has very competitive labour costs and, above all, it contributes about £2 billion per year to Britain's balance of trade.

No one could doubt that Britain's aerospace industry is truly world class—it is perhaps our last world-class industry in terms of skilled activity. I ask Ministers to ensure more Government support for this great industry. Will the Ministry of Defence use its undoubted weight to get positive Treasury backing? The industry is now in a state of flux on the mainland of Europe, so why should Britain not urgently seek to take the lead? The Ministry can help it to do that.

I should also like the Ministry to ensure that the Government give the aerospace industry a much bigger research and technology budget. That is an urgent requirement, as it is the seedcorn that will deliver the profits in the years ahead. Will the Ministry acknowledge that the aerospace industries of other European countries and of the United States have far bigger research budgets?

Are Ministers still committed to the FLA, and specifically to the 40 to 50 aircraft that it is mooted that the Government will buy? Are Ministers stressing to France and Germany the importance of the FLA project? I should like the Government, and especially Defence Ministers, to say that they have done everything possible to bring the project into being. Many of my constituents are dismayed at having to endure the lengthy delay in making the decision.

Are the Government using every diplomatic device and all possible pressure to persuade the French to make up their mind about the FLA? I very much want Defence Ministers to take the lead in the Government in putting more pressure on the French Government because I feel that the French interest, activity and approach is very weak—indeed, wimpish. It is up to our Ministers to use all their weight to ensure a positive outcome.

Having said all that, I must thank the Minister of State for Defence Procurement for being so accessible and courteous when I raised these matters with him, and specifically when he patiently received the deputation that I brought him in respect of the FLA project. I am most grateful to him. I now invite him to visit the Broughton factory, where he can see the making of the airbus wings. Were he to visit the factory, he would surely boast about the skills and successes of my constituents.

I also draw the Minister's attention and that of his colleagues to the chilling headline in the authoritative *Financial Times* earlier this week:

"Aerospace industry sees 30,000 job cuts".

My constituents who work on the airbus were dismayed to hear of proposed cuts on that scale. Cuts were mooted for the whole aerospace industry, of course. I would argue that a successful FLA project would be helpful in the context of those cuts. Are Ministers anxious about the signposting of redundancies on such a scale?

My second constituency point relates to RAF Sealand. Of the 1,600 people working there, 1,300 are civilians. I believe that it is the best maintenance unit in western

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Europe. It has a fine team—flexible, co-operative, productive and successful—and it did not let the RAF fliers down in the Falklands war and the Gulf war. In a way, it received battle honours.

At present, RAF Sealand is under a cloud, and that cloud—to put it bluntly—is market testing. My constituents say that market testing is a despised phenomenon. It sits uneasily alongside the task of a maintenance unit. That task is, at the drop of a hat, to respond in an emergency to war and to look after the interests of our fliers. We simply do not like the prospect of market testing. My constituents say that market testing is in effect ensnaring a loyal work force into what they believe is an ideologically inspired experiment. We do not want it and we do not see the need for it.

I want to put it on record that RAF Sealand has demanned in considerable numbers over the years. It is a co-operative unit and very positive and innovative. I have also found it to be very responsive. Market testing and the failure of an in-house bid would be a very poor reward for being loyal and carrying out a patriotic duty.

My advice to Ministers is, if it works, don't fix it. My plea is that they make this part of Wales a market-testing-free zone. The deal that we are offering is this: if they take market testing away from RAF Sealand, we will continue to deliver the goods and to find the savings. I urge Ministers to place a moratorium on market testing. Why not kick it into touch?

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement was also accessible and courteous when he received my deputation from RAF Sealand. Equally speedily, he accepted my invitation to visit RAF Sealand. I express the thanks of those who work at RAF Sealand for the trouble that he took to see the base for himself. Perhaps I may therefore put a few questions to him on RAF Sealand.

Why was the deadline for bids to take over the work at RAF Sealand delayed yet again? That rankles at RAF Sealand. The leaders of the work force, who have been so loyal to the unit and have worked so hard on the in-house bid, believe that private contractors may be getting an unfair advantage by being allowed more time to gather information for their bids. As we see it, more time means a more competitive bid against those who have made the in-house bid in good faith. My constituents are wondering what answer would have been given if the in-house team had sought an extension. Suspicions have arisen and I draw them to the attention of the House in good faith.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In view of the detail of that question, I should like to answer it immediately. The reason why the tender was extended by five weeks was that more time was needed to answer bidders' formal questions and to provide them with up-to-date detailed Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations data, and to update the invitation to tender.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister, as I am for his written answer on pretty well the same subject. However, suspicions remain, and it was worth making the point in the House.

The Minister might agree that the prize in the market-tested bidding is the maintenance and repair contracts. The big boys in play are GEC and Brown and Root. The fear back home at RAF Sealand is that there will be redundancies if either big company wins the contract. If the in-house bid fails, it is our sincere view that the Ministry of Defence will lose in the long run because the unit will not work as effectively as it does now.

It must be emphasised that the large predators bidding for the contracts at the expense of my constituents are bidding for profit. My loyal, patriotic and co-operative constituents at RAF Sealand want the in-house bid to win—for the sake of RAF Sealand, Wales, Britain, and ultimately, those brave and most professional aircrew.

Now that the Minister has visited RAF Sealand and gained a full understanding of the unit's complexities, and bearing in mind the difficulties with the recently contractorised Nimrod major servicing unit at RAF Kinloss, which follow major difficulties with the Airworks Tornado contract at RAF St. Athan, how can the Government remain convinced that the risks of a contractor operating the far more complex organisation of RAF Sealand are justified?

That is a genuine concern. On Deeside, we believe that the Government must take that into account. I know that the Government care about the future of the RAF. Do the Government agree that the taut but flexible contract that will be required to enable a contractor to operate RAF Sealand is unachievable in practice? We believe that it is. I express those views on behalf of my constituents.

I do not usually refer to the *Daily Mail*, but I shall do so in this debate. On 1 May, a large headline read: "Air defences down as Nimrods are grounded". The defence correspondent said:

> "A quarter of the RAF's 24 Nimrod spy planes have been grounded because of a maintenance crisis.
>
> Repair and servicing was handed last year to a contractor as part of the Defence Ministry's programme of switching such work to the private sector to cut costs.
>
> But sources at Kinloss, Grampian, where most of the Nimrods are based, claim the contractor is dogged with problems ranging from a lack of expertise to poor morale. One said: 'It is a nightmare.'"

My constituents at RAF Sealand do not want that nightmare. They want, very proudly, to continue to deliver a fine service to the Government and the RAF. I speak on behalf of a work force who delivered during the Gulf and the Falklands wars and who know what they are talking about.

I very much hope that Ministers will give fair play to my constituents who have submitted the in-house bid, bearing in mind that the Ministry of Defence wants long-term success, not a short-term response to an ideologically motivated approach. After all the wonderfully co-operative work at RAF Sealand, it would be a terrible kick in the teeth if the in-house bid lost. My full support must go to the maintenance unit. I am sure that the RAF's high command is very proud of RAF Sealand and does not want market testing to lead to an outsider winning the contract. I certainly put on record my pride in that wonderful base.

I have received messages today from those who work at the unit in my constituency. They have noted that Brown and Root and others in the consortium have gained contracts at RAF Valley in Anglesey. Their message to me is that that will not improve the spirits of those who work at the unit. Mr. David Barratt took the trouble to telephone me at 7.50 pm to say that the bid at RAF Valley had been lost to the outside contractor. He said:

"I think this will have an effect on RAF Sealand."

I know this councillor and I respect his concern, which I have put on the record on his behalf and on behalf of my constituents.

Having told the House of two thundering successes in my constituency—RAF Sealand and Airbus—I wish to refer briefly to a tragedy, an injustice and the loss of hundreds of jobs. Seven years ago, 1,200 skilled men and women made a world-class, two-engined executive passenger jet that could fly the Atlantic. So good was the product that a United States multinational, Raytheon, accepted an offer which could not be refused and bought the business for a song—just like that. Although jet production continues for the time being, half the original jobs have gone and the rest are scheduled to go soon. The jobs will be exported from my constituency to the United States, and that wonderful, world-leading aircraft will be made not in my constituency but in Wichita in Kansas—the home state of that powerful and influential politician, presidential candidate Bob Dole.

Mr. Mans: I have a certain sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I am slightly at a loss to understand what his remarks have to do with a debate on the RAF.

Mr. Jones: If the hon. Gentleman will listen for a few more seconds, I will show him why I am entirely in order. I invite him to make the same statement in my constituency in front of my Raytheon workers: he would need my protection. However, I know that he made it in the best sense and was not being mischievous. If he will listen, I will explain.

Before I so foolishly gave way to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans)—I note his origin—I was saying that Senator Bob Dole might perhaps have had a hand in the move. Later this year, the Raytheon jet makers in my constituency will suffer considerable job losses. I believe that they deserve better.

I thank the Minister of State for receiving a deputation of Raytheon workers. The Minister, who comes from the same party as the hon. Member for Wyre, gave a lot of his time to allow my constituents to make a passionate, well informed case for Britain's future as well as for their own. I thought that they made a wonderful case, and the Minister's reception of us was most helpful and hospitable.

I invite the Minister to my constituency once again, to visit the Raytheon plant, where he will be astonished and astounded—and very proud—to witness the skills of my constituents, who on current probabilities are soon to lose their jobs when the making of that wonderful machine moves for ever from Great Britain to the United States. That is madness. It is unjust and it is wrong. I know that the hon. Member for Wyre will now agree with me and will wish to show his support for the campaign that we are mounting.

I should like the Ministry of Defence to reward my excellent Raytheon work force with the contract to service the Hawker jets that the Ministry of Defence owns. The hon. Member for Wyre forgot that my constituents have made—and the Ministry of Defence has bought—25 to 30 of those machines, which I believe are now known as Dominie aircraft. As my constituents see the loss of their manufacturing jobs drawing ever nearer, they have had to ask themselves what they will do. They have made a fine business plan whereby the current manufacturing centre would become a service centre for the whole of Europe, for all the machines that the work force has made over the past quarter of a century and longer.

It is in the gift of the Ministry of Defence to award the service contract to Raytheon. If that happened, we could save many jobs and a presence would remain in Britain. The Government have admitted what I once described as the breakfast sale of the century—the sale of the Hawker jet to the United States—so what special help will they give? The work force have been so positive that they deserve a reward. They seek to make that plant a service centre for the whole of Europe, maintaining and servicing those fine machines, and that is a reasonable ambition for my constituents to have.

I have thrice thanked the Minister for his reception of our deputation, which was of great consequence for my area, and I hope that he will ponder my request carefully. So far, I am most grateful to him.

8.22 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Unlike some of my hon. Friends, I can claim neither personal military experience nor personal memories of the great days of the Royal Air Force in the 1940s, which for me must come alive through film and newsreel, or through the tales recounted by those honoured veterans who were there.

However, in my constituency there are many members of the Royal Air Force, ranging from the most junior ranks in the service to some of the most senior and decorated. At RAF Halton, just outside the village of Wendover, is the centre of the Royal Air Force's basic recruit training, and about 12 miles along the Chilterns, in the village of Naphill, lies RAF High Wycombe, which is the base of Strike Command and now also the home of the new Anglo-French group.

In the years since I was elected to the House, what has impressed me enormously is the tremendous pride that every member of the service, from the rawest recruit to the most senior air marshal, takes in the Royal Air Force. With that pride in the service goes a strong sense of duty to the nation that the RAF serves.

Last summer that was brought home to me strongly, when I had the honour to be invited to act as the reviewing officer of a parade of new recruits leaving RAF Halton after their basic training. Talking to those new members of the service—young men and women in their late teens or early twenties, and to their families—what struck me was the fact that they could draw on the history of the RAF, not as an arid museum of experience but as a living tradition. It was a history that gave them meaning, a sense of corporate identity, and a continuing sense of duty and purpose as they entered on their careers in the service.

There is no doubt that, for both the RAF bases in my constituency, the last couple of years have been times of great challenge and some difficulty. Some problems have been specific to each base, and others have been shared with the rest of the service as it has made its adjustments to the defence costs review.

At RAF Halton there has been a switch from technical training to basic recruit training. The base has also seen the reorganisation of the medical provision for the armed forces, which has led to the closure of the Princess Mary

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Royal Air Force hospital, and the reorganisation of dental services, which has also affected Halton. I hope that it will not be too long before Ministers will be able to resolve the uncertainty that still surrounds the future of the Princess Mary hospital site and the associated office space at the Halton base.

Various hon. Members have mentioned RAF quarters. For Halton the problem lies not with the policy change that is in train, but with the fact that question marks persisted for some years over the future of the base, until the decision was taken to relocate basic recruit training there. That meant that very little was spent on the buildings on the base, so there is now a substantial backlog of work, which I hope Ministers and senior RAF officers will ensure is tackled.

RAF High Wycombe has had to cope with the reorganisation of headquarters functions, and both stations have had to manage the problems associated with the overall reduction in RAF personnel and the contracting out of support services. Those policy decisions have certainly caused difficulties for my constituents, but I am sure that they were the right decisions.

Senior RAF officers who gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee only a few days ago said that the RAF's savings from the defence costs study would contribute about £300 million each year once the changes were implemented in full. At a time when not only the defence budget but all areas of Government spending are subject to scrutiny and to great pressure, it is clearly right for Ministers to look for every opportunity to make savings in administration and support services, so as to concentrate on providing our young men and women in the armed services with the best equipment and training, to enable them to do their job on behalf of the nation.

I would find some of the criticisms that Opposition Members have made during the debate slightly more compelling had they not coupled their critique of the Government for making savings or for seeking to contract out support services with additional demands for expenditure on defence procurement, or for taxpayers' support for defence industries. There is an inconsistency in the position of Opposition spokesmen, which Ministers have every right to expose.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces acknowledged that these necessary policy decisions have led to problems for individuals. Personal hopes have been disappointed and career ambitions frustrated, and far-reaching changes have been made to the organisational culture of many parts of the RAF. I therefore welcome his acknowledgement of the scale of the challenge facing the RAF in the next few years, and his tribute to the professionalism that the services are showing in tackling those changes and seeking to manage them in a way which deals as sensitively as possible with the real dilemmas and difficulties facing service men and women.

As the service comes through a period of turbulence, the duty lies with Ministers to demonstrate clearly to service men and women of all ranks that the RAF will continue to offer a fine career to new recruits and that it still has a central role to play in the United Kingdom's defence strategy. That cannot be done by exhortation alone, although exhortation and reassurance from Ministers—who must showing solidarity with the officers and men in the services—is important.

We must also think clearly about the future of the service in the post-cold war world. There is still a great deal of uncertainty about the nature of future threats to the United Kingdom and the interests that our armed forces might be required to defend in various parts of the world. I therefore welcome the steps that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team have taken to enhance the role of the Western European Union in the Atlantic alliance.

I see no contradiction between a sceptical attitude towards some of the more extravagant ambitions of the European Union—although I could add a scepticism that would be recognised by my distant predecessor Edmund Burke, if not by one or two tabloid newspapers—with an equal desire to search for ways in which the countries of Europe can co-operate more effectively in the field of collective security.

Mr. Mans: I am interested in what my hon. Friend has to say about the WEU. Does he agree that, if we want European states to collaborate, we have a perfectly good way of doing so through NATO? The WEU is surely not the way forward.

Mr. Lidington: The Government are right to make it clear that NATO should remain the cornerstone of the western Atlantic alliance, but it is compatible with that principle for the Government also to try to strengthen the European pillar within that alliance. The recent White Paper on the intergovernmental conference proposed that we look for a strengthened role for the WEU as one way of giving effect to that policy.

I am pleased that we have seen some fruit from our efforts to woo France back into the main stream of the western alliance. It was a difficult courtship, conducted with the delicacy and the restraint appropriate to a Jane Austen novel. I am glad that we seem to have received a favourable response from Paris, although, as some Opposition Members have said, there is still a long way to go.

In addition to the importance that the Government rightly place on the Anglo-French relationship, I hope that they will have regard to the need to bring Germany more fully into the defensive arrangements of the Atlantic alliance. I know that there are differences between our approach and that of the current German Government, who hope to develop a defence role European Union. I personally do not think that that is desirable.

Speaking to younger German politicians, one realises that members of the Bundestag are quite rightly confident about their national identity, and take an understandable pride in the achievements of a democratic Germany during the past 50 years. They accept that one aspect of their maturity as an advanced democracy will be to play a more active role as a partner in western defence arrangements in the future. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government will be able to strengthen our relationship with Germany in the years to come.

8.35 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): A characteristic of our debates on the armed forces is that many things are said on which there is agreement. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who is well informed and speaks with great experience on these matters. As always, I learned something from listening to him. He said, rightly, that one of the things that the House must be concerned about is that relatively few Members entering the House for the first time have served in the armed forces.

The hon. Member for North Tayside said that that small number were supplemented by some hon. Members who take a particularly close interest in the armed forces, and mentioned in that context my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who has a long-standing interest in the RAF. He forgot, however, that my hon. Friend has served in the RAF. I know that because I travel to and from Yorkshire with him frequently. As a graduate of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, he suggested to me that I might usefully spend some time in the scheme. I did so last year and the year before and, as someone who has not served in the armed forces, I learned a great deal from it.

I want to say some things that the Government may not agree with, but I base my remarks on what I have learnt during my visits to a considerable number of RAF bases, and I believe that this needs to be said. I am sorry to have to say it, but this has been a bad year for the RAF in terms of the number of aircraft that it has lost. In five months, the RAF and the Royal Navy have lost 11 aircraft, and two air crew from the RAF and two from the Royal Navy have lost their lives. That is a considerable number, and compares with the six aircraft lost by the RAF during the Gulf war.

In his opening speech, the Minister suggested that it was irresponsible to ask questions about what has been happening and why. I do not share that view. The House should be asking deep, serious and penetrating questions about these accidents. I do not intend to detain the House for too long, but we should remind ourselves of the aircraft that have been lost.

In January, two Tornado F3s collided in mid air in the middle of a training exercise. The following day, one of the attack GR1 Tornados was lost in Germany, and a Jaguar was lost that month as well. In February, a Hawk aircraft crashed on take-off at RAF Valley. The pilot, an experienced man, was killed. The press reports about that accident suggested that the reason for the crash may have been that the ailerons had been disconnected for servicing and had not been reconnected before the flight. I do not expect Ministers to comment on that until the air investigation report is published, and when it is published it will, of course, be made available to hon. Members in the Library.

Two Royal Navy Sea Harriers were lost, together with an RAF Harrier and another Tornado GR1 that month. Last month, a Tucano, from RAF Linton-on-Ouse near my constituency, crashed in Wetwang in Humberside and, last Monday, a Hawk aircraft was lost at an air display in Portugal.

The losses in the five months of this year have been twice the average rate of loss in the past four years. In his opening speech, the Minister, who is now in his place, said that those losses were nothing other than an unfortunate coincidence; that the loss of those aircraft and lives was simply bad luck. That could be the explanation, because accidents by their nature do not happen in a regular cycle.

The figures for air accidents are fickle and they go up and down. In 1991, the armed forces had a bad year and lost 20 aircraft, but those figures—in an especially bad year—showed a lower attrition rate than was suffered in the first five months of this year. Of course, five years ago, the armed forces had more aircraft in service than now.

Of the 11 aircraft that have been lost—nine RAF aircraft and two Royal Navy aircraft so far this year—10 were fast jets. In 1992, the Royal Air Force had 647 front-line fast jets in operational use or in in-use reserve. Now 580 fast jets are in use. In 1992, three fast jets were lost, or one for each four months of the year, but in 1996, so far, 10 fast jets have been lost, or two per month. The loss rate is eight times higher than in 1992.

It is right and acceptable for the Minister to hope that the high loss rate that we have had in recent months is just bad luck. I, too, hope that that is the cause. I hope that the loss rate will right itself in time and that it is an unfortunate statistical quirk, but it is irresponsible to assume that the only cause is bad luck that will right itself. We must consider the alternative explanations and discount them only when we have firm evidence that we should. When an accident happens, there is a thorough investigation and the reports of those investigations are placed in the Library. Each of those investigations considers a single accident.

I was not convinced, by the Minister's intervention in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), that sufficient attention is paid to trends from one accident to another and whether there are any common factors. My hon. Friend was right to say that a special inquiry should be set up to consider whether there are some common factors in the high loss rate.

I understand that none of the aircraft lost this year has been maintained by contractors. We have had evidence that contractors can fall down on the job. All hon. Members present will know about the Airworks problem when 18 Tornado aircraft were damaged, causing a repair bill of some £100 million. The same company damaged 11 Hercules aircraft. According to the Defence Select Committee's report of December last year, the company caused serious damage to the aircraft by cutting away load-bearing stringers, omitting fasteners, deviating from drawings and drilling holes in the air frames in the wrong places.

I shall give the House a long quotation—longer than I would normally use, so I ask for the House's forbearance—from the evidence given by Hunting plc to the Defence Select Ctte in its inquiry into market testing. Hunting plc said:

> "Notwithstanding the policy that value for money and quality are now the key determinants in the award of a contract, practice suggests that the cheapest tender still wins. As a consequence, contract prices are being driven down to levels which will, in the final analysis, create longer term problems or possibly failures. There is already sufficient evidence to show that the lowest price bid is not always the most cost effective."

The cost-cutting approach that contractors necessarily follow is copied by RAF engineering teams who seek to retain work in house, as my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) pointed out. That, after all,

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

is the very intention and purpose of contractorisation—to consider whether the job is being done in house as cost-effectively as possible. But the House must ask at what point the competitor pressures and contract culture start to undermine standards of RAF engineering.

A second hypothesis has been put forward by certain hon. Members about a possible—I say no more than possible—cause for the current high incidence of aircraft loss. That is that the defence drawdown has reached a point at which it is beginning to compromise the operational effectiveness of the armed forces and the RAF in particular. I was sorry to hear the Minister suggest that to raise that issue is an irresponsible act by a few maverick Labour Members. The same fear has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and one of them is present tonight.

The Independent, on 28 February 1996, in a report on a meeting, stated:

"Fears that cuts in defence spending may be partly to blame for the string of crashes by RAF aircraft are to be raised with ministers by senior Conservative MPs."

From the context of the article, I believe that one of those who attended that meeting, and who was also probably the provider of the information to the journalist, is here on the Conservative Benches tonight.

During my year with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I became acutely aware of the enormous pressure on those serving in the Royal Air Force. Hon. Members have made that point already today and I will not dwell on it. The RAF is now smaller than at any time since the second world war. In March, 5,600 officers and men were made redundant from the RAF, although the RAF is now deployed in more places overseas in an operational role than at any time since the second world war. I will not list all the places but during my time on the parliamentary scheme I had the opportunity and privilege to visit the RAF detachments at Palermo, Gioia del Colle and Aviano to see what life was like and what the job—at least, the job at the base—entailed. I also observed the morale of the people involved in the front line on operational duties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) spoke about the huge pressure on front-line jet pilots, who spend perhaps 200 days a year away from home in either a front-line operational role or training; they are away from their homes and families. When a detachment is deployed, it is not just the air crew who go—engineering staff and ground crew provide back-up.

There are 450 RAF personnel at Gioia, and most of the air crew are deployed for a three-month period. One evening in the sergeant's mess—the bar in the big hotel where most of the NCOs were billeted—a young airman told me that his wife had given birth to a baby shortly after he had come out on deployment. He would not have an opportunity to go home to see his wife or baby for two months; it was impossible for him to go home for a weekend while on an operational assignment. Those who have served in the armed forces will know that that is forces' life, but it seems to me, as someone who has not served in the forces, a hard burden to bear.

However, if someone signs up to the armed forces, that is part of the deal. If someone is deployed away from home for a quarter of the year—that is the average—that is what he comes to expect. But as the pressure to be away on operational duties more frequently steps up, the pressure on the individual and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North said, on that person's family, increases too.

The problems of pressure are compounded by problems of job insecurity and lack of promotion prospects. At RAF Odiham I met an extremely able young aircraft engineer who had served in his rank for seven years. He was told that he had no prospect of promotion; in the past he would have been promoted two or three years earlier. That happens not just at NCO level, but at officer level. Hon. Members have talked of the numbers of middle-ranking officers leaving the RAF because there is no a career ahead of them if they stay. Morale is, to say the least, fragile.

On 25 February this year an RAF officer was quoted in *The Observer* as saying:

"We have a problem. Frankly some of our guys are just worn out."

The RAF trains harder and flies better than any air force in the world. It is an incredibly valuable and prized national asset but it is currently being squeezed from both sides: its budget and its manpower are being cut while its operational obligations are increasing.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), who is no longer in his place, reminded the House that NATO inspections of RAF bases have been suspended. Annual formal inspections of RAF bases have also been abandoned. Participation in the royal tournament has been reduced to a minimum because the resources are no longer there. That reflects the pincer pressure—the RAF has greater commitments and fewer resources. The strain is beginning to show. The House and the Government need to answer the question: are we now, and have we been, expecting and requiring the Royal Air Force to do too much with too little for too long?

8.53 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) and pleased that he has had such a pleasant time with the RAF under the parliamentary scheme that we have with the armed forces. I shall not dwell too long on what he said, but I want to make one point in relation to the accidents that he mentioned.

During his time with the Air Force, the hon. Gentleman may not have picked up the fact that a continuous inquiry is being held into the relationships between different accidents, as well as near-accidents and incidents. Every such incident, near-accident and crash is looked at to see whether something has gone wrong which could affect other aircraft in that fleet or with that role. Therefore, the idea of another special inquiry is superfluous. I am confident that that exercise is continuing all the time. If there are lessons to be learned from the spate of accidents, they have already been learned or certainly will be learnt when the full findings of those accidents are made available in the normal way.

A number of other speakers tonight made a series of requests of my hon. Friend the Minister, and I shall start with a personal one. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) said, he is a member of the Royal Air Force Reserve, as I am, and a pilot. I have been personally affected by the changes in the Royal Air Force over the past two years. The aircraft that I have been

flying for the past 19 years sadly left service with the RAF on 31 March after a period of 49 years, 10 and a half months. It was perhaps a little churlish of those in charge of the operation not to postpone that for an extra six weeks, to ensure that the aircraft had been in service and had flown for 50 years.

I have been forced in my middle age to learn to fly a new aeroplane. I was slightly worried by what my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside said about the possibility of the air experience flights and the university air squadrons having yet another new aircraft, as I can see myself having to prepare for that in a special way. All I ask of my hon. Friend the Minister is to let us have a little information about that as soon as possible, as I should like to know whether, in the near future, I shall be required to go through the exercise that I have been through over the past month yet again.

Compared with previous years, the RAF has, over the past year, been in the news a great deal. As we have heard, the news has not always been welcome, and it has not been an easy year for the RAF. What is sometimes forgotten is that, when politicians sign off decisions, service men have to implement them and do so for a considerable period. As Lord Craig said in the House of Lords on Monday in another debate, the devil is often in the detail.

It is a tribute to the service men of all three services, but particularly the RAF, as it is the subject of tonight's debate, that they have got on with the job and done what has been required of them in a year when manpower has been reducing rapidly and many non-core activities have been contractorised. I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for North Tayside and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), and I worry that we might have gone a bit too far.

I very much want to see the new Valley contract operate properly and successfully. I am certain that the people employed will be first-class, but we need to look closely in the medium and long term to ensure that we have the balance right.

That also relates to flying training, for which an element of discipline is necessary. That has to be taught at some stage during training, but if there are too many civilian instructors, it will be harder to do so. We must be careful and analyse in detail the effects of the changes. One can easily add up the figures, save money on flying hours at the beginning of training and turn out a pilot with wings, and show that one has saved the taxpayer money in doing so, but one must then see whether that individual is as effective on his squadron as his predecessor was two or three years before who went through the previous system.

As far as I am concerned, the jury is still out. We may well have got it right. We may well have saved money. We may well have retained the operational effectiveness of which the Air Force is rightly proud, but I want squadron commanders in front-line air squadrons, front-line aircraft, to tell the Ministry of Defence how the new pilots who have been trained in the new ways are performing; whether they need further operational training to bring them up to the required standard; or whether they are achieving that standard just as quickly—I hope that they are—as their predecessors did a few years ago. Only then will we know whether the changes have been successful. I hope that they are, because we want to move forward, but we should not count our chickens just yet.

Also occurring this year—I hope that it is transitory and will not continue—is the changeover from manning by airmen to manning by contractors. Undoubtedly, gaps will be created as a result. We have already seen that. The RAF, quite rightly, has curtailed activities that are not essential to its front-line duties. I fully approve of that, as it is a reasonable response. It is a difficult year, and I look forward to the time when most of the contracts can be awarded and we can create more stability in the running of the armed forces, particularly the Royal Air Force.

Indeed, while suffering a cut of 42 per cent. in its strength over seven or eight years, the RAF now operates in more locations overseas than it did before the change. Its tasks are greater, while its resources are fewer. It is worth saying that the RAF has always had a tradition of getting on with the job and doing it well, and that is precisely what is happening this year in the units that I have visited, in which there is still the same professionalism and commitment to the job. A good illustration of that, which has already been mentioned, was the Red Arrows' highly successful trip around the world, which did much for the quality of the RAF, its professionalism and, indeed, the serviceability of the excellent Hawk aircraft they flew. They performed well, and I am certain that that will lead to many exports.

For the reforms that have taken place to bed down, it is important that we have the period of stability that we are always promised. I agree with a number of hon. Members, from both sides of the House, who said that we should look more closely at the proposal to sell off the married quarters estate. I shall not dwell on the matter. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) was right. I believe that we can gain what we need by getting rid of the vacant quarters and at the same time provide the necessary resources to upgrade quarters that are below standard, without having, at this stage at least, to go through the much larger operation of selling the whole estate, which is envisaged. In a slightly parochial sense, the RAF has always spent a bit more than the Army on its estate, with the result that it is likely that the proceeds used to upgrade the estate will go in the direction of the Army rather than the Air Force, although that is probably right if one is to bring all the quarters up to a particular level.

In talking about stability, I shall make one other point. The Labour party—I welcome this—tries to suggest that defence is an issue on which we can combine, that there should not be a diversity of view in any sense and that it is an issue on which we agree. I would like to see, in that spirit of bipartisanship, the Labour party drop the silly idea of a further defence review. I cannot think of anything more likely to create the very conditions that we and the Labour party least want to see.

A defence review would not promote stability. It would promote anxiety across the whole rank structure as to what would be the next change. If the Labour party is serious, it should say, "The armed forces are about the right size; we have got it about right. We shall not have a defence review—we shall have to make the odd change here or there, but we shall not have a review." I do not understand why those on the Labour Front Bench cannot make—or have not made—that commitment. I hope that they make that commitment later tonight.

[Mr. Keith Mans]

I had planned on making a few remarks about air power. However, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—who is a former Guards officer—made a tremendously supportive speech about the use of air power, and I was encouraged by that. I am unable to add anything to what my hon. Friend said about the importance of air power in the future.

If aeroplanes and air forces are to carry out the tasks that they are asked to do, they must have the right weapons and platforms. Eurofighter is of vital importance to the future of the Royal Air Force. Despite some of the knocking copy that we have seen in the media, the programme is doing relatively well compared with previous programmes. The workshare arrangements seem to have been worked out.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellent work that he has done in that area—he has ensured that the Germans understand that, if they buy fewer aircraft, they cannot expect the share of the work that they had in the past. That has been a highly successful outcome and I am pleased about the new management structures, which may even reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) that the programme has some chance of succeeding in the future—he seems to think that it has not in the past.

Mr. Wilkinson: I have confidence in the aeroplane, but I query the need for a European Armaments Agency. That is a separate issue from the management of the aircraft.

Mr. Mans: I apologise to my hon. Friend.

I shall refer briefly to some of the other programmes. Many hon. Members have referred to the criteria for the Nimrod replacement. I acknowledge the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside and of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East on ensuring that we have the right aircraft.

We had a similar debate about 25 years ago, and the Royal Air Force decided on a pure jet solution. We have to ask why we want to change our minds. It raises a number of questions, such as whether the right decision was made all those years ago, to go for a particular concept, which was different from the concept that the Americans went for at that time. However, I noted that the Japanese Government recently said that their new maritime patrol aircraft should be a pure jet and not a turbo-prop.

I suggest caution in relation to export potential. We all want to export and to ensure that the aircraft that the RAF buys has export potential. However, we must not be beguiled by the idea that a huge number of orders will flow directly from a particular decision being made. Export potential is important, but it does not happen quite so soon and is not as lucrative as people make out when the original decision is made.

We need decisions on the two missiles that have already been mentioned today. I hope that those decisions—as well as the decision on the Nimrod replacement—will be made before the summer recess. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood about the missiles. I believe that there is a lot of sense in some of the collaboration that is taking place, provided that it can be done cost-effectively.

When it comes to the conventionally armed stand-off missile, we should look at the opportunities of moving it forward, so that we can get the benefits of a reduction in research and development expenditure when we combine with NATO and others to produce new systems.

I hope that we can find out exactly what the private finance initiative is that is associated with university air squadron and air experience flight aircraft. That is important, because it is a way of ensuring that, in future, cadets and students at universities get a bit more flying than they have had until now.

It is dangerous for politicians to make predictions, but I make one tonight about air power in all its facets. The Air Force has not gone through a very easy patch in the past year or so. The very basics of the use of air power have been challenged by, I suggest, many people ignorant of those matters, who have drawn completely the wrong conclusions. I was very pleased by the remarks that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood made on that subject.

I believe that, in future, air power will be more rather than less important. It allows one to project military force over great distances speedily. Technology is driving its capabilities forward very fast. In practice, politicians find it an effective way of responding to crises speedily—and with a minimum of casualties, which, although it is always important, is even more important in our multi-media age than it was previously.

I strongly believe, therefore, that despite the difficulties in the past year or two, the Royal Air Force has a great future.

9.11 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am very pleased to be able to speak for just a few minutes at the end of this important debate.

I was almost put off by the enormous experience of my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans), who have just spoken from their experience as serving RAF personnel. My experience of the Royal Air Force was confined to only 18 hours of dual flying in the university air squadron before the RAF decided that a 6 ft 5 in, substantially framed gentleman in a flying helmet and a Chipmunk were completely incompatible.

Over the years, my constituency has led me to speak frequently in the Army debate, the Royal Navy debate and the defence estimates debate, although infrequently in the Royal Air Force debate. We have had Chatham dockyard in my constituency, and we still have the Royal School of Military Engineering. I believe that the nearest RAF establishment was at RAF Detling, which is quite a long way outside the constituency, but we do have a substantial interest in the defence industry.

Shorts started its life in the Medway towns, and we still have one of our leading-edge technological firms in GEC-Marconi Avionics. There is scarcely a procurement project that does not involve GEC in some consortium or other, and I make no apologies for pushing its claims for the replacement maritime patrol aircraft. I think that it offers the only new aircraft among the three contenders. The idea of refurbishing a 25-year-old airframe appears highly speculative.

I have visited GEC. The company has an impressive simulator of its mission system avionics suite. I understand that the combination of the P3 aircraft with GEC avionics makes a formidable contender for that contract. I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement takes that difficult decision—which I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre needs to be taken very soon—he will take into account the fact that that aircraft is likely to have a long service, and make up his mind as to which will be the best option for long service with economic through-life costs and so on, and not simply choose on the basis of a figure for initial purchase.

My final point concerns married quarters. A substantial garrison is situated in my constituency—although it is not a Royal Air Force establishment—comprising several married quarters. My constituency home backs on to married quarters. Service personnel in my constituency are worried that, although my hon. Friend wishes to ensure that those who are entitled to married quarters should continue to have that entitlement, little has been said about availability. Entitlement does not guarantee availability.

I am particularly worried that we may build in unnecessary rigidities in terms of married quarters. I am concerned about potential purchasers' proposals to dispose of married quarters at the time of renewal if they wish either to develop the site or to offer a comparable alternative site. I am worried that comparable sites may be remote from the establishment that the married quarters serve, which could affect the ability of wives and families to find work in the area. If the purchaser decides to develop a married quarters town site—there is such a site in my constituency—alternative provision some distance from that site would involve substantial hardship for families.

I believe that the proposal should be rethought. I have seen my hon. Friend's letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who is very interested in the issue and had hoped to participate in the debate. I share my hon. Friend's concerns about the matter and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to rethink the proposal to sell the entire stock.

I understand the problem caused by the 11,000 voids. Are those voids associated with closed establishments? Do they relate to married quarters that have no future use and could be sold off readily? Are they voids within established estates around existing and continuing garrisons, such as the one in my constituency? I should like answers to those questions. Some of those 11,000 voids could be sold in order to raise substantial capital, which would be sufficient to renovate some of the estates that I know are in bad shape. Some married quarters in the Medway towns are in a poor state and need capital spent on them. I question whether my right hon. and hon. Friends'' proposal is the best way of raising the necessary capital.

9.17 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that the standard and the quality of the speeches in today's debate has been very high. That is due in part to hon. Members' associations with the Royal Air Force. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) served in the RAF and my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) spent some time with the RAF as part of the armed services scheme. The hon. Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) brought to the House a diversity and richness of experience that has made the debate particularly interesting.

In addition, a number of hon. Members have in their constituencies RAF stations or defence industries which employ many people. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces began the debate, quite correctly, by referring to the recent activities of the Royal Air Force in Bosnia—my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) gave a vivid account of his experiences in the former Yugoslavia—in the Gulf and in Northern Ireland. Since the unfortunate ending of the ceasefire, the RAF has played a very important role—as it always has—in preserving peace in the Province.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth, among others, said, the world has changed considerably in the past decade and defence cuts were inevitable. However, the scale has been pretty enormous. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), in his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, said that morale has inevitably suffered because of the cuts. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) spoke about turbulence in the Royal Air Force, and the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood also mentioned those difficulties.

By the year 2000, the Royal Air Force will be down to 55,000 men and women. That represents a 38 per cent. reduction in manpower. I agree that defence is a matter of consensus, but at the last general election the Conservative manifesto stated:

"They"—

that is the Labour party—

"would devastate our conventional forces by cuts of at least 27 per cent. which would lead to huge job losses."

The Government have exceeded that.

The hon. Member for Wyre, who is not in his place, said that there was no need for another defence review. Tonight is not the time to go into the rights or wrongs of that, but some of the more devastating effects of the cuts might have been less devastating had there been a well thought-out defence review as we have suggested.

By March 1997, there will have been 8,600 redundancies in the Royal Air Force—the largest cut since the second world war. Many of those redundancies are compulsory and 5,000 of them occurred in the current year. Strike command is particularly affected, contributing the largest number at just over 3,000. My hon. Friends the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) and the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) all referred to the effect that that has on RAF stations up and down the country. Stations at Brize Norton, Lyneham, Brampton, St. Athan, Cranwell and others are due to lose considerable numbers of personnel. Some operational stations were better stocked in 1935 than they are in 1996.

I would like to give the House the first quote of the evening from the *Royal Air Force News*, which is a semi-official newspaper. This is what it said about the redundancies:

"Coupled with the fact that not all applications for redundancy have been accepted, this creates the seemingly anomalous situation in which some who want to go have been told they must stay while others who want to stay have been told they must go."

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

That is not right. If, instead of Treasury-led cuts, there had been a proper review of our defence in terms of resources and matching commitments, it would have been a different story.

I should like to quote the hon. and learned Member for Fife, from last year's RAF debate.

"I do not believe that we could contemplate any further reduction in funding for the RAF, without affecting its front-line strength. There is a limit to the reductions of the numbers of personnel or the contracting out of support services that can be made".—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 491.]

We all agree with those sentiments and a number of hon. Members referred to them this evening.

A year or two ago, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon publicly disagreed with the Treasury—and then had to publicly retract that disagreement—when the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who happens now to be the Secretary of State for Defence, was asking for cuts. The air chief marshal was particularly concerned about the comparison that was made—presumably by spin doctors—with the Israeli air force. He is reported as saying:

"the Israeli comparisons were deeply misleading. Whereas the Israeli Air Force was simply defending its own air space and could mobilise reserves overnight . . . the RAF had to maintain bases as far afield as the Falklands, Hong Kong, Northern Ireland and Germany plus a NATO headquarters."

That is perfectly right. I sometimes wonder how such stories get about. Labour Members have mentioned and will mention again the advice that the Secretary of State for Defence receives. Perhaps some of these advisers were at last night's infamous party, and we wait for the Minister to give us some explanation of what happened there. I refer to Mr. David Hart, who, in *The Spectator* on 6 February 1993, attacked the RAF as top heavy,

"with too many command groups controlling too few front-line squadrons."

I do not deny that all sorts of people can have views on the RAF, but in an article in *The Observer* in January this year, Mr. Hart was described as

"unelected, without the responsibilities of a civil servant and lacking any military experience. Mr Hart is a millionaire property developer, failed playwright and novelist."

I hardly think that such people should be providing advice to the MOD and House of Commons.

I note that, in December, *The Daily Telegraph*, not normally a friend of my party, managed to discover a Christmas card sent out by Mr. Hart, on which he was dressed as a pilot. The newspaper said:

"For certain sections of the MoD, the sight of him tricked out as a fighter pilot is enough to curdle the bread sauce."

People such as Mr. Hart should return to their previous professions and leave giving advice to people in the armed forces and the MOD who know what they are talking about.

Mr. Hart was probably responsible for initially advising that we should lease American second-hand airplanes—which eventually did not come—instead of updating Tornado F3s. I am delighted that hon. Members on both sides of the House were responsible, I hope, for changing the minds of the MOD and Ministers, who sensibly take no notice of people such as that.

We have talked a lot in the debate about the relationship between the defence industry and the MOD and procurement. I hope that, in his winding-up speech, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will make announcements on the replacement maritime patrol aircraft. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East and the hon. Members for North Tayside and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) have all referred to that.

Perhaps the Minister will make an announcement on the future large aircraft. My hon. Friends the Members for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) talked at some length and with great feeling about the FLA, and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside discussed its effect on his constituency, which I hope to visit fairly soon. I hope that the Minister will tell us what is happening. Has France announced that she will pull out of the programme? What will happen? Will he look into that? What pressures are there in the negotiations that are proceeding between ourselves and the French Government?

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), who has now left the Chamber, talked about the relationship between procurement decisions and the defence industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West said, it is about time that we thought about that relationship. When the MOD makes decisions, they have enormous consequences for employment prospects, research and development and this country's manufacturing base. There is a unique relationship between the two. All hon. Members believe that that is the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for York in particular and the hon. Member for Wyre referred to the tragic and costly aeroplane crashes. I understand what the Minister was saying: that there is not necessarily a link between the 11 crashes. They have cost lives and nearly £200 million. We must consider the fact that that compares with an average annual loss of 14.2 aircraft between 1991 and 1995 and that the losses occurred in a front-line fleet that is approximately one third smaller than in 1991. I do not know whether training cuts or "over-stretch" have anything to do with it. I do know this. When the individual inquiries are opened, it will behove the Ministry of Defence to consider the incidents as one to discover whether there is a link. If there is, Ministers should tell the House what must be done. We cannot answer those questions.

My hon. Friends the Members for Warley, West and for Alyn and Deeside mentioned RAF St. Athan, which is also of interest to me as a Welsh Member of Parliament. We have been told that market testing is important to cut costs and ensure that money is properly spent. That may be true in some cases but has proved devastatingly wrong for St. Athan. The Minister has a duty to the House and the nation to say exactly how much money taxpayers must provide to pay for what has happened there.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred to the Bett report in respect of married quarters. I assume that the House will be informed of the Government's response before the summer recess, because that report is of enormous importance to all the armed forces and especially to the RAF. Pensions are a significant and worrying issue. On 30 May, no fewer than five former Chiefs of the Defence Staff wrote to *The Times* to express their concern about service widows in particular. I hope that the Minister will take those views into account. As

he knows, the value of the pension has dropped since 1980. The immediate pension for personnel leaving at age 40 has been justified by the need to compensate them for their low salary expectancy in civilian life.

Sexual harassment in the armed forces is of concern to many hon. Members. The Government should produce reliable figures and tackle the problem seriously if they are genuine about wanting to attract more women to the armed forces and to the RAF in particular. There is no excuse for harassment, which should be dealt with effectively. In 1995 there were 10 reported cases, four of them in the RAF. Those were only official complaints. No central record is kept. All complaints should be recorded. I have no doubt that many women are afraid to complain about harassment, so proper methods should be introduced to make it easier for women to express their concerns.

The hon. Members for Wyre and for Gillingham spoke of the significance of the RAF. The Chief of Air Staff has said that the Air Force is at the heart of national security. We all agree. We are familiar with the problems that change has brought and sympathise with personnel who have lost their jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North made an important point about sustainability. We must plan for not just the next two, three or five years but for decades ahead, which requires much thought and a proper defence review. The move to the contractorisation of support services, and to reducing stocks of spare parts and ammunition, carries elements of risk. There are other areas of concern.

We have not ended the review of the Royal Air Force or of the other armed services, because the world has changed and will undoubtedly continue to change. A number of hon. Members, including the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, said that we live in a highly dangerous world—more dangerous in a way than in the days of the cold war. I believe that the United Kingdom's role will be centred on our international obligations as a member of the United Nations and, of course, as a key member of NATO. The RAF will play its important role in that, as it has done in the past.

It is significant that we are debating the RAF on the anniversary of D-day. It is significant that my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth talked about a medal for Bomber Command, because all hon. Members—particularly those of my generation—owe a great debt to all the men and women who served in the RAF in those years. We pay our warmest and most sincere tribute to them.

9.34 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): This has been a valuable debate. It has raised such a large number of issues of considerable importance that, inevitably, I shall not be able to deal with them all in the time available. I apologise for that. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forced or I will write to hon. Members whose points remain unanswered.

I have received a number of requests for contracts, for visits and for information. I think that the most delightful was the request from my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) that he not be forced to retrain on a different aircraft. I have bad news for him, because the Bulldog aircraft is used to provide university air squadrons and air cadets with air experience flying. Earlier studies suggested that there were potential value-for-money benefits in replacing the Bulldog early. That process is now under way. It is a private finance initiative project, and we aim to secure the best value for money achievable through a negotiated contract.

Mr. Frank Cook: Is there any truth in the rumour that the Bulldogs will be replaced by Sopwith Camels?

Mr. Arbuthnot: That remains for negotiation.

We aim to place a contract in 1997, so it is likely that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre will have to retrain fairly soon. I suspect that he might like to do so in a Sopwith Camel, but he is a young man and I know that he will make it through without any difficulty.

We have heard some outstanding speeches in this debate, including those from my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), for Wyre and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope).

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) made a powerful speech, which we have come to expect from him as Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. One of the important points he made was the value that this country receives from buying equipment—as we sometimes do—overseas and from industrial participation coming into this country, making use of outstanding British skills and providing jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside also raised the issue—as did the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) and my hon. Friends the Members for Aylesbury and for Gillingham—of the married quarters estate. I am happy to accept the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside to dispel the misapprehensions that surround that issue. He referred to a recent letter of mine, in which I said:

> "Misapprehension number one. It has been suggested that recent rises in Married Quarter charges are somehow linked to the Sale"

of the married quarters estate,

> "almost as though there were some 'hidden agenda' to discourage Service families from living in married quarters".

That is absolutely not the case. We have no intention whatever of discouraging accompanied service. Obviously we will not force people to live in married quarters. We must recognise that many personnel have an understandable wish to live in their own homes, which we could not and should not sensibly try to frustrate. We are completely committed to the value of "the patch", to the value of cohesive communities and of mutual support, which do so much to foster the service ethos and to reduce unnecessary worry about families left behind when the services go overseas.

We are committed to providing the right quarters in the right places for service families who wish to exercise their entitlement. Charges for quarters—here I deal specifically with an issue that was very inappropriately raised by the hon. Member for Warley, West—are recommended not by the Ministry of Defence or by the Treasury but by the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay, a fully independent body whose independence should not be impugned or doubted.

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

Also in my letter I referred to the second misapprehension:

"It has been suggested that the Sale will lead to the break-up of Service communities, and the introduction into Service housing 'patches' of undesirable neighbours."

That is not so. The real issue is how to reduce the high vacancy rate in MOD homes while at the same time keeping down social tensions, but that is going to be a challenge whatever happens to the estate.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre and for Gillingham referred to the possibility of selling the surplus homes we already have. I agree that, if it were possible to continue to pursue the policy that we have been pursuing for a number of years, and if it had the effect that we would all like, we would do so, but, unfortunately, that policy has proved unsuccessful.

The change that occupants of the married quarters estate can expect from the transfer that we are proposing is that significantly more money will go to the upgrading of quarters where standards are poor. Without the sale, of course we would try to find the money and do our best as far as the money would stretch, but only a sale can give us the sort of capital injection we need to get what we want within a reasonable time scale and without it being subject to the ordinary and inevitable pressures of the public spending settlement.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) asked about RAF Carlisle. I have two pieces of news for him. First, there is no market testing at RAF Carlisle. As he knows, we are closing the site progressively and looking for expressions of interest in it, but no decisions have been taken about the most appropriate means of disposal. Secondly, we have had no requests to store bonemeal at RAF Carlisle and, under current plans, no bonemeal is likely to be stored there.

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful for the Minister's remarks, and my constituents will be, too. However, is it not a fact that the MOD has said that it will withdraw from the joint venture and be subjecting the site to market testing? I have the minutes of the meeting in question if the Minister would like to see them.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do not want to create any confusion in the hon. Gentleman's mind. Market testing is very different from asking for expressions of interest in the site. As I said just now, we have not made any decisions about the appropriate means of disposal of the site. When we start to make decisions, the hon. Gentleman will of course be one of the first to know.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) made an interesting speech. He suggested that defence was a matter of consensus. I have news for him, too: the consensus is that Labour cannot be trusted on defence. Labour is committed to a fundamental defence review. That is no more than a device to cloak the party's desire, driven by Back-Bench and conference pressure, to cut defence spending. A review would cause precisely the instability that the armed forces wish to and must avoid, which the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), in an excellent speech, said that he did not want.

At the end of the last decade, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) believed that all nuclear weapons should be removed from British territory. That position remains the gut feeling of the Labour party. Labour's problem is that defence is simply not one of its spending priorities. It would be its natural target for cuts to pay for things that are priorities.

One need only look at the letter from the Transport and General Workers Union, which has sponsored the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and one or two other prominent members of the shadow Cabinet. It calls for defence spending to be reduced from £22 billion to £4 billion. That reflects the genuine views of many Labour Members. I exempt from that accusation several Opposition Members who have spoken in this debate, including, for example, the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Stockton, North, who have always taken a very sensible view on defence. Unfortunately, that view is not shared by the majority of their party.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that, year after year, the Labour party has made it clear that it is fully committed to membership of NATO? Does he also accept that over the past few years his party has sought to create division in the House of Commons in public party political utterances, but is desperately eager to present a united front when dealing with the Western European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and so on? He cannot have it both ways. The Government cannot have our co-operation when we are abroad in serious debate and expect to play silly party games of the sort that he has just indulged in.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman is a valiant defender of defence, but he is a rare voice in his party. He asks what was happening year after year, and I will tell him. Year after year, Labour party conferences called for cuts in defence spending and for the removal of nuclear weapons. That is what the Labour party believes in.

Mr. Spellar: As has been pointed out to Ministers a considerable number of times, their Government have been implementing those cuts. Indeed, the Minister has not yet answered the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) about the level of cuts in the RAF being greater than those that the Conservative party claimed at the last election would take place under Labour. That is the reality: the Government say one thing and do another.

Mr. Arbuthnot: That is nonsense. The problem is that the Labour party does not believe in defence. It believes in a number of different concepts, and defence comes at the end of the queue for spending. It might be a good idea if I moved on—*[Interruption.]* I think that I should move on to more sensible policies than those of the Labour party.

The House has taken the opportunity today to reaffirm the vital role played by the Royal Air Force in support of the United Kingdom's security interests. The Government are firmly committed to providing the men and women of the Royal Air Force and their civilian support with the means necessary to fulfil that role. There can be no question but that the effective use of air power continues to be vital in the changed strategic setting that we face.

We have moved away from planning for defence against the monolithic threat that the Warsaw pact represented. Now we need to be ready to respond to the many and varied risks to our security that might arise. It is necessary to consider only the crises to which our forces have reacted in recent years to realise the breadth of possible tasks.

In the Gulf, we were part of the largest allied operation since the second world war, which successfully liberated a friendly country from unprovoked aggression. In Bosnia, we worked to safeguard the supply of vital humanitarian aid to civilians caught up in a tragic civil war. We form the second largest contingent in the NATO force which ensures the peace.

At the same time, we have maintained our commitments to the defence of our territory and our presence in the dependent territories, as well as our continuing commitment to NATO. The withdrawal from Bruggen by 2002 will enable the RAF to make more effective use of time available for training and does not in any way imply a weakening of our commitment to the alliance.

The operations that I have mentioned are examples of the wide range of missions that the RAF of today carries out. The importance of different facets of air power has been clearly demonstrated and we must be prepared to ask the RAF to perform those and many other kinds of duties in the next few years and into the new century.

I should like to take this opportunity to record my personal gratitude to the personnel of 5 squadron at RAF Conningsby, who afforded me the privilege of taking a flight in a Tornado F3 just before Christmas. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East was right when he spoke about white knuckles. I was able to see for myself, when my eyes were not shut, the brilliance of our Air Force pilots, who are rightly respected the world over, and the formidable power of the F3 as an air defence fighter.

The importance of "Front Line First" was founded in the need to develop the right support structure for the new kinds of forces that we need for the 21st century. We are seeing a worldwide progression towards smaller but more capable forces. Quality is of ever-increasing importance as quantity reduces.

The reform of the RAF logistics community has meant enormous efficiency improvements and savings. New management systems building on best commercial practice have been effective in promoting better management of stocks, without compromising either safety or the RAF's ability to respond to contingencies.

The "Competing for Quality" programme has generated further efficiency improvements. Across the Air Force, more than £155 million-worth of business has been market-tested, generating £41 million of savings. That is crucial, because, by bearing down on the costs of support for the front line, we have managed to sustain increased investment in Air Force equipment within a stable defence budget.

We aim to identify, and realise, the full potential for improving long-term value for money in defence support by systematically exposing all RAF non-core activities to private sector involvement. Significant "Competing for Quality" programmes in the near future include that at RAF Sealand, which the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) mentioned, and that at RAF St. Athan. Both those programmes are proceeding well.

The Air Force has been active in pursuit of the opportunities offered by the private finance initiative. Many Air Force projects, at varying stages of maturity, have been identified as having potential for PFI. Those include the provision of simulators and associated training, and the replacement of the Bulldog elementary flying trainer, which I mentioned in connection with the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre. It was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside, who has such a valuable contribution to make in all matters concerning cadets. Other projects with private finance initiative potential include the provision of utilities at various RAF stations.

As a result of "Front Line First", CFQ, PFI and other initiatives—I am sorry about all those initials, Mr. Deputy Speaker: CFQ stands for "Competing for Quality"—we are now able to devote a greater share of our resources to providing the right modern equipment for the RAF's front line. By the end of the decade, Logistic Command's expenditure will fall from one third to one quarter of the RAF's budget, yet, as a result of efficiency improvements, we shall be able to continue to support a front line for which equipment expenditure is expected almost to double by the turn of the century. That is a remarkable achievement. The RAF will be smaller than in the past, but it will be prepared for 21st-century military combat.

The sheer breadth of the forward equipment programme demonstrates clearly our commitment to that vision of highly resourced, flexible and responsive air power. All areas of the RAF's front line will benefit from massive investment in fighting equipment, which will amount to nothing less than a technological revolution in the RAF's inventory.

Much has happened since the House last had a debate on the Royal Air Force. Important progress has been made on a number of major projects, including the Eurofighter, which several hon. Members have mentioned. Following upgrades, the first two development aircraft resumed flying in May 1995. Those were joined shortly afterwards by the third development aircraft, which is fitted with the EJ200 engine specially developed for Eurofighter. The flight test programme has now notched up over 160 sorties, steadily expanding the aircraft's performance envelope. Last month, the aircraft made its debut at a major international air show when it took part in the flying display in Berlin, and it is expected to appear at Farnborough later this year.

I announced on 5 March that we have decided to upgrade the weapons systems of the Tornado F3, and that was welcomed on both sides of the House. That programme will enable the aircraft to carry advanced short-range air-to-air missiles and advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles, and will thus improve the F3's capability against modern airborne threats.

Also during the past year, we have signed a contract with GKN Westland for 22 Utility EH101 medium support helicopters for the RAF, and another with Boeing for 14 new-build Chinooks. Together with the programme to upgrade our existing Chinook fleet to HC2 standard, which has now been completed, those programmes will provide the RAF with a flexible and highly capable support helicopter force, which is vital for the support of joint operations.

The first Hercules C130J aircraft, 25 of which will be delivered to the UK from 1997 onwards, had a successful maiden flight in April this year. I listened with care to the

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interesting points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood about strategic lift and the C17. We have joined the United States production programme for an upgrade to the radar system of the E3D Sentry airborne early warning aircraft. This will ensure that the RAF maintains an effective early warning capability against modern aircraft and missiles. Within the tanker fleet, all but two of the VC10 aircraft undergoing conversion to the air-to-air refuelling role have now been delivered.

The programme to update 142 Tornado GR1 interdictor strike aircraft to GR4 standard is progressing well. This will greatly increase the aircraft's ability to prosecute its targets in all weathers, using new generation smart weapons. The first Tornado GR4 aircraft will enter service in 1998, and the aircraft will remain the UK's front line attack aircraft for another 20 years. We have also undertaken a programme to improve the capabilities of the Jaguar—a matter referred to by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East—pending its replacement by Eurofighter in the next decade. That has involved giving the aircraft a thermal imaging and laser designation capability, together with certain enhancements to the aircraft's avionic systems. Twelve aircraft have been upgraded as part of the initial programme, and we expect the remainder of the long-term fleet to have completed their upgrade by 1998.

Of great importance in the near future are the competitions to provide the RAF with new air-launched, stand-off and anti-armour weapons. The conventionally armed stand-off weapon was mentioned by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) in relation to the work by Shorts that is going into one of the contenders for that programme. These weapons will significantly enhance our capabilities against high-value infrastructure assets and modern armoured vehicles respectively. We expect to announce our decisions shortly.

In December last year, we issued an invitation to tender for the future medium-range air-to-air missile, which with the advanced short-range air-to-air missile will provide Eurofighter's key weapons for the air defence role. We also expect to announce shortly the winning bid in the competition to supply a replacement for the RAF's aging fleet of Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. *[Interruption.]* I say "shortly", because I have been asked whether the decision will be made before the recess. Unfortunately, I do not know when the recess will be. I shall address my inquiries to the Refreshment Department, which always seems to find out before Ministers.

The maritime aircraft proposal was referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), for Wyre, for Romsey and Waterside, for Ruislip-Northwood, for Gillingham and for North Tayside. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside correctly said that the most important thing was to buy the right aircraft.

We have continued to work with industry and our partner nations within the future large aircraft programme to ensure that we can rejoin the project, provided that the conditions we set out in our announcement in December 1994 are met. That matter was mentioned by the hon. Members for Warley, West, for Wentworth and for Alyn and Deeside, as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre. We await clarification of the French position. It is not wimpish to do that, as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside suggests. The French position is crucial to the future of the project.

Looking slightly further into the future, we are examining how we might best meet the requirement for an airborne stand-off radar system to support land-based operations. There are several significant decisions to be made in the near future. Expenditure on equipment for all three services as a proportion of the defence budget will rise over the next decade. This coincides with a period of change within the defence industrial sector itself, and will be of great benefit to British jobs and firms that rely on that sector. In our reply to the report of the joint inquiry by the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade and Industry, we gave several important pieces of evidence and I do not need to repeat them.

In answer to the thoughtful speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon, I agree that we need to collaborate more with Europe, but not at the expense of collaboration with the United States, which is an important partner.

The equipment programme that I have outlined displays clearly the Government's firm and lasting commitment to the Royal Air Force. We will ensure that RAF personnel are given the training, equipment and support that they need to do the job. The whole country can take pride in the Royal Air Force.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Computer Systems (Century Date Change)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): This is my second attempt to raise a matter that should concern everyone who has or uses a computer. Thus it is one that will concern most businesses and all Government Departments, not just in this country but throughout the world. It is the effect that the change of date at the turn of the century, from 1999 to 2000, will have on computers. Quite simply, if they are not prepared, they will fail.

Articles in computer magazines and, more recently, in the national press have sensationally described the situation in terms such as "Millennium Meltdown", "Catastrophic Computer Crash" and "Doomsday 2000", and I have been prompted to pursue the matter in the House. I asked a question of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last December; I have sent a series of written questions to every Government Department—most recently, to my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology; and I have corresponded with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It appears that I am the only hon. Member to pursue the matter thus far, and the publicity that I have provoked has produced expressions of relief that, at last, someone is doing something.

I am pleased to have the opportunity tonight to enlarge on the problems, and I am sure that I am not the only one to look forward to the Minister's reply. I fully confess to being computer illiterate, a fact which may become even clearer during my speech, although I value the immense advantages that computers provide, and over the years I have been blessed with staff who have been fully educated to take advantage of them.

Computerisation of our parliamentary offices has enabled us, as Members of Parliament, to increase our throughput a hundredfold and has improved our ability to communicate with and respond to our constituents efficiently and effectively. No doubt those improvements will be as nothing compared to the promised revolution to come, when we are linked up to the Internet and the World Wide Web.

A constituent came to see me at my surgery last autumn to share his concern that neither business nor Government appeared to be aware of, let alone ready for, the century date change. Even I was able to grasp the potential seriousness of the problem, and my initial inquiries confirmed that my constituent's fears were far from groundless.

All but the most recent computers have been programmed to recognise a shorthand standard date format—dd/mm/yy—with two figures for the day, the month and the year. For example, my hon. Friend the Minister's date of birth would be given as 18/04/45.

Because memory is or was very expensive, programmers economised by cutting out the first two digits of the year—19—to save money and memory. Thus two-digit year dates exist on millions of data files used as input to millions of applications. Therein lies the problem. Those computers will recognise the double zero digits of 2000 as 1900. As a result, all calculations, logic and date-driven processes will fail to function properly at midnight on 1 January 2000. If my hon. Friend's computer does not recognise the century date change, it will show his age to be not 55, but minus 45 in the year 2000. I would not want that prospect for my hon. Friend.

All of us with personal computers can apply a simple test to see whether they will fail at the end of the century. We can set the date to 31 December 1999 and set the time at 23.58. We can switch off the computer and, after a few minutes, switch it back on to check the date. It should say 1 January 2000, but my computer said 4 January 1980. Some 95 per cent. of all personal computers fail that test.

The vast majority of our information systems are based on the original, faulty standard date format, which will cost billions of pounds to reprogramme. One estimate of the cost is put at £400 billion worldwide and £20 billion for this country alone; the cost to the United States Government will be $30 billion. Those costs are rising daily, as the shortage of skills available to undertake the necessary reprogramming and recoding is realised.

There can be no doubt that, unless organisations are prepared and have taken the necessary action, they will face catastrophic consequences, including a disastrous loss of trade and revenue—it is no exaggeration to say that some of them may go out of business very early in the new century. Many of them will have experienced a minuscule taste of what is to come on 29 February this year, as some computers did not recognise the extra leap year date. A piece of medical equipment in a hospital failed to work on that day.

I shall give a few everyday examples to help to explain the wide-ranging consequences of what might happen. The competitive position of many exporting companies will be severely threatened unless they have anticipated the problem in time. Any timetable for a 1999 single European currency will require new computer systems to be in place. Supermarket computers will fail to replenish stocks and will throw out existing stocks, calculating that everything will have gone mouldy on the shelves after more than 99 years. The time locks of buildings will be unable to recognise the correct date, so staff will be locked out and vaults will be open. Trains will not run because their control systems will be unable to say what else is on the track that day. Flights will be cancelled as computers in airport maintenance will have grounded all aircraft because they are 99 years overdue for overhaul.

The turn of the century will have similar consequences for the computers of Government Departments and agencies unless they have been properly prepared—the most obvious being the automatic payment of benefits systems and the pay-as-you-earn system that generates millions of tax returns.

Such a computer failure would affect our system of court orders, the child support maintenance system and car licence expiry dates. Traffic lights and school bells will operate their weekday schedules. Libraries will send out notices of fines for some seriously overdue books, and any programme that prints a date on a cheque or invoice will stop working properly.

The potential for disaster lies most in the financial sector. The interdependency of computers and the complex computer systems used in all financial transactions will create huge problems for City institutions. Even if their own systems have been

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reprogrammed and are working correctly, other firms with which they are dealing may not have had the same foresight.

A firm may be awaiting the processing of a derivatives contract in Singapore which, if not correctly processed, may undermine that firm's short-term liquidity. The huge sums that are transferred every day in settlement of bond, equity, trade or foreign exchange flows bring the danger of a systemic breakdown of the banking settlements system, which could lead to temporary liquidity crises, and perhaps bank failures.

London, as we know, is the centre of the global financial services industry, so it is vital that the UK takes a lead on this issue. Most major financial institutions will, I hope, have their systems in order on time, but interrelation of the industry means that all firms will have to be made aware of the seriousness of the problem. What assurances or policy proposals has my hon. Friend received from the Bank of England, the London stock exchange, city regulators and the European central bank to prepare the markets for 2000?

Last month, I tabled written questions to every Government Department to find out how they are responding to the problem. I was encouraged to learn that most Departments seem to be aware of it, but not all are treating it with the seriousness that it deserves. Many of the replies I received showed undue complacency.

I hope that their confidence is justified and that, with the advice of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—CCTA—and computer suppliers, they will be prepared for the century date change. However, because public sector systems are in general larger and older than those in the private sector, I should like to know my hon. Friend's understanding of the percentage and the number of Government computers that will need to be reprogrammed or replaced, and his estimate of the cost involved.

As my hon. Friend knows, I also tabled a question on his Department's recent survey of the problem in this country and the action that it will take to alert and help businesses to respond to it. In his reply, he said that the survey revealed

"a high level of awareness amongst IT directors of organisations."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. *152*.]

How does that square with newspaper reports that only 8 per cent. of businesses have conducted an audit to assess the extent of the risk, and that more than 90 per cent. are failing to deal with it?

A recent survey of IT directors of major UK firms undertaken by the magazine *Computer Weekly* shows that most large firms are aware of the problem, but most are still undecided what to do about it. I look forward to learning from my hon. Friend precisely how the Government are alerting business to the problem and precisely what help and advice will be available, especially to small businesses, which I imagine will find responding to the problem much more difficult than larger corporations.

As one of the essential messages seems to be that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and most computers are dependent on others, it is not enough to adjust one's own computer and rely on others to do the same. Inevitably, there will be those who will not respond.

Is the problem not serious enough to contemplate, as the Singapore Government are doing, the introduction of statutory guidelines for businesses to follow? Perhaps we should consider following the example of the United States, which recently held congressional hearings on the problem. I urge my hon. Friend to read the testimony from that hearing, as it makes very interesting reading as well as being alarming.

Fortunately for us, it appears that, because ours is a more sophisticated information technology market, European companies are in a worse position than ours in planning for 2000, so I put it to my hon. Friend: is this not an opportunity for British skills to be exported abroad and to establish a crash course for those prepared to offer those skills?

It would appear that much has happened since I drew the Prime Minister's attention to the problem in the House last December; that the Government are taking appropriate action regarding the computer systems for which they are responsible, and are now alerting others of the need to do the same. I welcome that.

The century date change should be treated as the most devastating virus ever to affect our information technology system. The message from the debate must be clear. This is urgent. The majority of computer systems will fail if action is not taken, and the majority of companies are not aware of the problems they face. There are fewer than 850 working days left in which to take action. If action is not taken, companies will face enormous difficulties. This is one of the greatest challenges facing business management today. I look forward to my hon. Friend's response to a crisis that will face our national daily life in less than four years' time.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for raising this important issue on the Floor of the House, for pursuing it through questions, and for discussing it with me. I openly admit that he has informed my views on the subject. As Minister for Science and Technology, I have had the opportunity to discuss this with many people in the industry. This is a timely and necessary debate. It is surprising that a relatively simple issue can have such serious implications. I welcome what my hon. Friend has said this evening.

I join my hon. Friend in raising the alarm this evening, and I shall put it into context. Information technology is crucial to industry and to our competitiveness as a nation. The cost to the United Kingdom of not fully exploiting information and communications technology would be infinitely higher than the cost of putting this problem right.

I do not wish to understate the problem. On 8 May, in a written answer to my hon. Friend, I said:

"The longer it is left, the higher the likely cost of remedial work. I am urging all chief executives to discover now for themselves the extent of the problem in their companies."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. *152*.]

My hon. Friend referred to awareness. Our survey with the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency showed that the awareness of the problem was higher than 90 per cent., but that action plans had not been put into place. That is the key point, and it is why I am so concerned about the issue.

My hon. Friend made some telling points about how the system could go wrong if the double digit at the end of the year throws up a double zero in the year 2000. For example, pensioners and others could lose their pensions and entitlements—or certainly not be paid them; centenarians could appear on primary school intake lists; all military and aeronautical equipment could be simultaneously scheduled for maintenance; thousands of legal actions could be struck out; student loan repayments could be scheduled as overdue; and 100 years of interest could be added to credit card balances. These things will not be particularly welcome.

Data could be sorted in the incorrect order. For example, the years 2000 and 2001 could be sorted ahead of 1997 and 1998, which could affect hospital waiting lists. In addition, housing allocation priorities could be wrongly assigned. There will be supply chain difficulties. For example, organisations with which a company exchanges data must have tackled the problem or errors will propagate through interconnected systems. If data are not shared, a company could survive the loss of a key supplier while it sorts out its IT system with difficulty.

In other words, it is vital that companies in supply chains take a mutual interest in attempting to eradicate the problem, to avoid a contagious disease. How long would companies survive if their customers could not pay their bills because their information system is not working?

Non-conventional information technology systems could also fail: process control; access systems, such as swipe cards which would appear to be outside the period of validity; air-conditioning systems that are pre-programmed; weapons systems—programmes using two-digit dates embedded in out-of-production chips will have a particular problem; and safety-critical installations in nuclear power plants and in air traffic control.

I have raised these points not to create a panic—I remind everyone that we are currently in 1996, so we have a while to go before the year 2000—but to alert people to the fact that action taken now is absolutely vital, because there will not be the opportunity to take action properly as the year 2000 approaches. I believe that some problems may emerge before the year 2000, which is why I am urging that audits are carried out into systems in various companies.

The resources will be needed to fix the problem. For example, for some of the older systems the COBOL-trained staff could become scarce and perhaps prohibitively expensive. Organisations may find that they no longer have the people or skills used at the time that their systems were built. The criticality of the problem is its scale: the billions of lines of code to search, the fact that the deadline is immovable—we know that it will occur after midnight in the year 1999—and the complexity and interdependency of the systems involved.

The suppliers of non-compliant software will need to be checked to discover whether they are prepared to fix the systems that they have installed or will walk away from the problem. We need to know much more about that issue or understand it much better.

Obviously, we need to be very careful in some aspects, such as the use of databases and spreadsheets that may have corrupt information in them, and which may not necessarily be understood by the people in companies who now work on them, because they will have been devised at an earlier period.

The predictions of industry experts as to what the problem is likely to entail vary hugely. Some say that 50 per cent. of information technology budgets will be spent on this problem, and therefore that money probably would not be spent on more constructive developments in information technology. There are estimates that, if the current rate of progress is maintained, at least half of companies will not achieve compliance by the year 2000, which will be an appalling tragedy for those companies, and, because they are interconnected, many others which have tried to be compliant. Obviously, some companies will go out of business if they have not tackled the problem, or not ensured that their suppliers have tackled it.

The cost is almost impossible to quantify, and I am very wary of putting a figure on it. My hon. Friend did put a figure on it which is a good deal higher than the figure given by Kleinwort Benson as quoted in the *Independent* this morning, which said that British computer users might have to spend £5 billion in the next few years on finding remedies to the problem. I shall not validate that figure; I merely pass it on as having appeared in the morning paper.

As a point of comparison, the Computing Services and Software Association members' revenues in 1994 were more than £7 billion. Those figures are increasing very sharply, and of course they are only a small part of the problem. We must consider not only software but mainframe hardware, which may need minor modification.

We need to examine operating systems, especially IBM, MVS and UNIX, ICL, VME, Digital VMS, DOS, Windows and so on, and we need to examine the application software. We need especially to consider companies who have installed bespoke or in-house applications, which could present the biggest problem if the people who installed it do not now work for the company or are unable to remember the keys and codes that were put into the system.

Let me say a few words about action. Within Government, the CCTA has written to all Government Departments, alerting them and requesting details of the remedial action being undertaken; and all new information technology procurements in Government and let through the CCTA must be millennium-compliant. Our systems in the Department of Trade and Industry are being reviewed. We have appointed consultants to plan a programme of work to make necessary changes to all systems to make them compliant by the year 2000; they will also work with our suppliers.

We have set up a departmental management group. In at least one of our systems in the DTI, we have a four-digit year, which is therefore not sensitive, but of course there are many other systems, and I repeat that our suppliers may have systems that are not compliant, so we have a considerable issue to resolve.

As to the private sector, I urge chief executives not to leave the matter to their information technology managers. I do not question the excellence or the expertise of those managers, but it is a management problem that must be dealt with at the top.

Chief executives of all companies of every size should conduct a demonstration of their computer system. They should set the computer clock at just before midnight and see what happens when it changes for 2000. They will

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

then find out whether they have a problem. If they have no problems—which I would find surprising—they must ensure that their suppliers and others who access their computing software do not have any. The situation must be managed, and the sooner the better.

The Government cannot do it for them. It is no use companies coming to us in 1999 and saying, "The Government have not fixed it." The Government did not install the computer software. Failure to deal with the problem could lead to commercial collapse—I put it bluntly because I want to get the message across. We cannot move the deadline, so time management in the interim is crucial.

In order to signal to business the seriousness with which the Government view the problem, I have written to the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the National Computing Centre, the Federation of the Electronics Industry, the Computing Services and Software Association, the Federation of British Electrotechnical and Allied Manufacturers Associations, the British Computer Society and the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, in order to meet and discuss the impact of the problem and try to find a way forward.

The Computing Services and Software Association—the lead trade association for the information sector—is working with the DTI to form a task force of users, suppliers and consultants, and the first meeting will be held before the end of the month. I stress that users must be part of the process. There is no point in only the software suppliers looking at the problem; users must be involved in the task force as well.

The DTI will publicise the growing body of help and information through its own World Wide Web site, and through business links and Government offices. The CSSA operates a World Wide Web site and business inquiry service which can put inquirers in touch with firms specialising in solutions to the problem. Guidelines on tackling the problem are due to be published next week. The CCTA and PA Consulting will be involved in that exercise.

Databases of millennium-compliant software are being compiled and updated, and conferences, seminars and workshops will be held. We shall contact interest and user groups. I am urging the trade associations, including those I have mentioned, to alert their members to the problem. The President of the Board of Trade and I launched the information society initiative in February. It is designed to encourage companies in this country to use computers, the Internet and electronic data interchange. We are not now discouraging them from doing so. It is not a question of not using information technology: it is a question of using it safely and of taking steps to ensure that new programmes are millennium-compliant so that the problem will not continually affect the system.

We shall provide advice through the information society initiative, while encouraging companies to use information technology. That item will be on the agenda for discussion at the multimedia industry advisory group, which will meet in the next week or so.

Trading and financial networks extend beyond our shores. We shall raise the matter with the European Commission, and we are considering what international organisation is best able to tackle the problem—whether it is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or the World Trade Organisation. There will be bilateral talks, including talks with the American Government, in view of their important role and that of the industry in that country.

Advances in technology are occurring so quickly that the problem may be resolved between now and 2000. New creative software packages may be designed that attack the problem at source. I am not overly optimistic, as many old systems must be dealt with. Nevertheless, I do not deny that there is a commercial incentive for someone to come forward with software that deals with the virus. We should be optimistic in that regard, bearing in mind the fact that computer power doubles every 14 months for the same price, the use of the Internet doubles every nine months and that we are seeing an explosion in information technology around the world.

It is inconceivable that anyone who is involved in the industry—be it as a supplier, hardware manufacturer, software creator or as a user—would wish to see the problem occur in 2000 and destroy so much creative effort and excellent information technology work. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue. I take it very seriously, and I urge everyone else so to do.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 June 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Sport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

9.34 am

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I greatly welcome the chance to debate sport again, although there is something ironic about discussing the subject on a day such as this—when we should all be outside in the sunshine either watching sport or playing it.

I hope that the debate will range widely. After all, we have an extraordinary summer of sport before us. The test match season started yesterday, with England doing well; the European football championship starts this weekend; and the Olympics, Wimbledon and rugby league—which is turning itself into a summer game—lie ahead. There is plenty to discuss.

I will deal in my winding-up speech with points raised by hon. Members in all parts of the House, but I shall start by taking up the subject from the point at which we left it in our last debate on 27 October, when we debated the Government policy paper "Sport: Raising the Game". I will also tell the House the great deal that we have done in continuing the momentum that we started and describe our initiatives in respect of schools, the British academy of sport and the regional network of sporting institutes.

"Raising The Game", which was published last July, contained the most important set of Government proposals ever produced to encourage and promote sport in this country. It affirmed a commitment to putting sport at the heart of weekly life in every school and to re-establishing sport as one of the great pillars of education alongside the academic, vocational and moral pillars. The policy also emphasised the importance of sporting opportunities continuing after school, and it included specific and funded proposals aimed at building links between schools and sports clubs. The document urged further and higher education institutions to promote sport among their students, and it presented specific and funded ideas on how to improve the way in which we support and nurture talented sportsmen and sportswomen. Finally, "Raising the Game" proposed the creation of the British academy of sport as a pinnacle of a network of centres of sporting excellence throughout the country, to bring out the best in our top athletes.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Can my hon. Friend give an idea of the timetable for establishing the academy of sport, to which we all look forward and which is needed at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. Sproat: I am happy to answer my hon. Friend, although I will deal with the academy in more detail as I work through the Government's proposals in the same chronology used for the policy statement. Within the next couple of weeks or so, we will produce the prospectus for the academy, and then allow three months for any consortium or group that wants to bid for it to do so. Subsequently, we will take two months to consider all the bids and will announce our decision in November.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Has my hon. Friend seen the astonishing document produced by the Labour party on its proposals for an academy of sport? That document appears to quote representatives from a number of sporting organisations, but it seems that all that Labour has done is hijack comments in praise of the Government's proposals. If Labour has completely misunderstood Government policy in suggesting that we believe in a single academy, whereas my hon. Friend may confirm that the Government are considering a number of academies, perhaps Labour is trying to make bricks without straw and Cunningham.

Mr. Sproat: I did see some of those comments and I was extremely surprised. It is a great pity that individual sportsmen and women are hijacked into being political pawns. As far as I am concerned, this is a non-party political issue. It is not right to take the comments of some people out of context. I know that many of the athletes were extremely surprised—even angered—to find that they had been quoted.

I hope that by the end of this debate, the Labour party will understand that there will be a flagship academy of sport, which will be linked to regional institutes of sport and other centres of excellence around the country. It was clearly spelt out in paragraphs 77, 79, 82, 83 and 85 of our document that there would be a flagship academy of sport with a supporting network in the regions. Indeed, individual sports will have their own academies.

I want to tell the House what we intend to do next. Fist, we will publish a follow-up document to "Sport: Raising the Game", which was published on 14 July last year. We will publish the new document on 15 July—the first day of that working week—setting out exactly what stage we have reached in the intervening year. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be extremely pleased to know how much progress has been made and how much momentum has been maintained in raising the profile of and increasing the opportunities for sport, not just for the champions, the medal winners or the players in international teams, but for every young boy and girl who is capable of deriving benefit from sport—for them, not just for our country's teams in the Olympics or the Commonwealth games.

I want to trace the pathway from young girl or boy through school to the local sports clubs and on to the centres of excellence and all the way up to the pinnacle of championship achievement at the academy of sport. I shall start with highlighting a little of the contents of our new report. The House will have to wait—albeit not with bated breath—until 15 July for the full details. However, I felt that as we were having this sports debate today, it was only right that the House should be given some inkling of what the Government have done and of what we intend to do.

Some people might ask why we start with schools. Sport in schools is probably the single most important element of our sporting strategy. I believe—as strongly as

[Mr. Sproat]

I believe anything in politics—that sport is a fundamental part of education. We do not have sport in schools simply because it is healthy, although it is extremely healthy. We do not have it simply because it is enjoyable for most pupils, which it is. We have sport in schools because it is important that healthy habits are inculcated in young people at an early stage.

Health and enjoyment are important, but what is fundamental is that sport teaches young people lessons that are not so easily or so well taught in any other way. The behavioural lessons of discipline, especially self-discipline, courage, team spirit, learning to play with others and learning to live within the rules are all vital. If sport had been better taught in schools over recent years, I am sure that we would not have witnessed some of the recent outbreaks of ill-behaviour. That is why the Government start from the premise that sport in schools is important.

We are trying to combine a number of elements in schools to increase the quality of sport and the provision of sporting facilities and to improve the ability of teachers to train. I want to run through some of the mix of ideas that the Government proposed and are now carrying through. I shall try to give specific dates so that the House will realise that this is not just waffle about what we hope to do.

Starting with the coming school year, every school will have to state its sporting aims in its prospectus, which is published at the beginning of the school year; at the end of every year, when that school writes its annual report, it will have to set out clearly what it has actually done, what team games it plays—something that has declined recently—what other games are played, what other schools it plays at what games and with what results, what coaches it has, which teachers have coaching qualifications, what sporting facilities are available, what time the school devotes to sport, what links it has with local sports clubs and what links it has with local businesses to get sponsorship.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): My hon. Friend's point about the time that schools devote to sport is very important. Has he studied the section of the national curriculum that deals with sport? Although it gives details of what children should be doing at each key stage, it does not clearly and specifically set down how many hours per week children should spend on playing sport. We could end up with wonderful statements but no definite results.

Mr. Sproat: That is an important point, which I had intended to raise a little later in my speech. My hon. Friend is aware that the new physical exercise curriculum, which was set in place at the beginning of this academic year, gives greater choice to schools to put more sport into the curriculum. Schools also now have greater choice to put other subjects into their curriculums. We have freed schools from some of the rather more restrictive elements of the national curriculum.

As I was saying, the school's prospectus and annual report will have to set out clearly what the school aims to do about sport and what it actually does about sport. Parents, governors, teachers and the wider community will be able to see exactly what a school is offering in sporting facilities and opportunities. Parents will then be able to make a choice. They will say, "Yes, we like this school's attitude to sport and we want to send our children there." That fulfils another virtue of giving people a choice and the necessary information to make that choice.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends shortly to publish a policy paper on the arts. I hope that we will be able to achieve the same with that. We are not concentrating only on sport, vital as it is; we are going across the national curriculum to let people know what schools do so that parents can make informed choices about where to send their children.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) referred to the time schools devote to sport. One of the seminal moments in our whole crusade to get sport back into schools was when I met a group of education experts a couple of years ago. I asked them to tell me how many hours a week an average 14-year-old in the state system would spend on sport. It took me some time to get an answer from that gathering of experts, but eventually one said, "Well, Minister, about one hour a week PE." I said, "An hour a week PE! When I was at school we used to play a couple of hours' sport every day." The expert said, "Oh, Minister, I didn't say sport, I said PE." I asked him what distinction he was drawing. He said, "Of course, Minister, PE includes aerobics, dancing, stepping on and off low benches and lessons in the history of diet." Those are all very worthy, but with only one hour a week they do not leave very much time for the sort of sports most real people want. That was the moment when I became determined that we would change sport in this country.

In direct answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam: we want to see schools aspire to two hours of sport a week within the national curriculum and within formal teaching time and four hours of sport a week outside the national curriculum and in extra-curricular time, whether that is during lunch times, after 3.30 pm—

Mr. Harry Greenway: Or on Saturday mornings.

Mr. Sproat: Yes. I remember visiting a comprehensive school in Berkshire in which the rowing coach and his crews came in at 7 am and were delighted to do so. I believe that that spirit is being revived among teachers in our schools. That is the answer to the very important point on time, which is one of the specific matters that we are changing from this academic year onwards. The school year starts in September, and that is what we want schools to aspire to.

One of the other provisions that we are introducing is an annual series of awards for schools to be called the sportsmark. Schools will apply to win a sportsmark, which they can display in the school. It will say that that school has achieved a high standard in sporting provision and sporting quality. It might be helpful if I read out one or two of the criteria on which the sportsmark will be awarded. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam will be glad to hear that the first criterion is to

"Provide a minimum of two hours a week of timetabled PE lesson".

I know that that will be quite difficult for some schools because they have a timetable in which there is not the latitude and elasticity that they would like—but that is what they should aspire to.

The next criteria are to

"Provide a minimum of four hours each week of organised sport outside timetabled lessons to all interested pupils.

3. Devote at least half the time spent on PE to both inside and outside timetabled lessons to games which should be played in a form judged appropriate for the year group by the relevant sports governing body"—

I must say, that is the type of jargon one must fight one's way through to get to the reality. It means that more pupils will be playing more sensible games, which they actually want to play.

The fifth criterion is that

"Teachers and others involved in extra-curricular sport should continuously gain coaching qualifications or leadership awards".

The sixth criterion covers the point that I mentioned earlier in another context, which is that schools should

"Have established links with local sports clubs"

and

"7. Encourage pupils to take part in sports governing bodies' awards schemes."

Sportsmark invitations will go out this October, and the first awards will be made next April. It is something to show to schools and say, "Here are the standards to which you should aspire." The award is not only for schools that are best at sport but for those that improve themselves from a very low base. It will be a very real encouragement to all schools, because we know that many schools, particularly those in inner cities, do not have the facilities that we should like them to have. We are not saying, "Just because you do not have all those sports facilities you cannot apply for a sportsmark." To a large degree, the sportsmark will be awarded for effort, to those schools that improve themselves, given their facilities.

To summarise: the prospectus will set out to parents, pupils, teachers and governors what the school aims to do in sport; the amount of time that is devoted to sport must be increased; and there will be awards—or prizes—for schools that do well, by means of the annual sportsmark awards.

I now come to the issue of teaching sport. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was a headmaster, and I am sure that he would like to say something about this issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, should he catch your eye. We are concerned that too many teachers do not have the qualifications for coaching that would most benefit pupils. Therefore, from now on—under the pilot project that will start this autumn—all teachers in teacher training colleges will be encouraged strongly to take coaching qualifications so that they are able to coach to a standard that is not tremendously high but which enables them at least to take a game of netball, tennis or football.

To assist with that goal and to put in some money, I have said that those are specific proposals and that they should be specifically funded. The Sports Council will put aside an extra £1 million for the National Coaching Foundation—to add to the £4.5 million that it already provides—to encourage the development of new modules to enable teachers who are in training to gain new coaching qualifications. That will apply to teachers in teacher training and to INSET—in-service training—teachers, providing them with the opportunity to go out and refurbish their coaching qualifications. Such refurbishment is currently a real problem.

Again, I am very keen that this debate does not appear to be party political. I fully understand that there is a very serious problem if working teachers have to take time out of school, particularly out of primary school, to refurbish their coaching qualifications or to gain such qualifications for the first time. If a teacher leaves a primary school to do a course, who will take his or her place? There are problems, which we are determined to solve.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving way on such an important topic. I wonder whether he can clarify one point. In the past couple of years there has been a debate over the fact that teachers who might be willing to give extra help with sporting activities say that they will do so only if they are paid extra money. Will he tell the House exactly what point we have reached in that debate?

Mr. Sproat: Yes. It is quite true that teachers feel that, if they are to do work outside the curriculum, they should receive extra pay. Some teachers very willingly do the work outside the curriculum without the desire for extra pay. However, there are opportunities for head teachers to give extra pay to teachers in those circumstances. It is up to head teachers to decide the matter. That is an important point, and I shall find out from the Department for Education and Employment to what extent advantage has been taken of the current opportunities to pay teachers more for doing extra work.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that relations are enormously improved between teachers and those taught when teachers take teams and coach sport? It is a very good addition to school discipline, and teachers who teach sport successfully become leaders in schools and are often valuable people for promotion. Does he agree that people who take the trouble to become qualified to coach a sport—they should be qualified to coach such sports as soccer, basketball, hockey or netball if they are to be respected by pupils at secondary level—deserve an addition to their pay? Perhaps those are also the type of people who should at least be considered for promotion.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I certainly agree that often teachers who have taken the trouble to earn extra qualifications demonstrate—by the fact that they wanted to do so—their wish to get on, their ability and their general stance, which very often is reflected across all their school activities. Of course they deserve to be properly rewarded. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, head teachers already have the power to do so. It is of course up to each school to deal with the matter in the manner that it thinks best.

I mentioned the need to encourage strongly generalist teachers to obtain some subsidiary sport qualification. The need for secondary qualifications applies generally, but this is a debate on sport.

On the matter of specialist PE teachers, I remember one head teacher telling me some months ago about a very good PE teacher whose specialist qualifications—in an inner-city school—were in weightlifting and in canoeing. The number of girls—or boys—who wanted to do weightlifting was not substantial, and the only place where they could have a canoe was on the local duck

[Mr. Sproat]

pond. So although that man was a good PE teacher, in many ways his specialisms were not of the greatest use to the pupils.

Therefore, a change from the next academic year, starting in September, will be that all PE teachers will have to be able to teach one mainstream winter game and one mainstream summer game, so that the majority of pupils will benefit. Of course, teachers will want to maintain their interest in weightlifting and canoeing and should be allowed to do so, but pupils must come first and PE teacher training must be directed specifically to providing what is of greatest help to the pupils.

Thus, the amount of time spent on sport is to increase, teachers' qualifications will improve and we are setting up the sportsmark system so that schools can see how well they have done. In addition, we have to make certain that once we have set schools all these new standards, they are in fact met. The Office for Standards in Education has agreed to change its system of reporting. As of now, for the first time, Ofsted is going to report on sport within the national curriculum and on sport outside the national curriculum. Just as the academic side of a school has been monitored by Ofsted, so the sporting, or extra-curricular, side is to be monitored.

In January this year, Ofsted published an extremely valuable document on best sporting practice in schools. It set out details of what some schools are already doing, which other schools might like to copy to improve their sporting provision. In the forthcoming school year, Ofsted will also report on teacher training colleges to make sure that teachers are being trained correctly in a way that enables them to teach sport in school. There has been more than a suspicion that teacher training colleges have not all applied themselves as they should to ensuring that teachers whom they trained understood the importance of sport and were able to teach it.

Also from now on, the chief inspector of schools will every year issue a report on sport. That report will be laid before Parliament so that when we have debates such as this, as I hope we will continue to do once a year at least, we have before us the specific information that we need. In the past, some people have said that the teaching of sport is no worse now than it has ever been. It was extremely difficult to prove anything, but, clearly, standards have fallen, shockingly in my view. However, from now on we will be able to see how far they have fallen. I must pay particular tribute to Ofsted for agreeing to take on these new, extremely important and necessary tasks.

We must also ensure that the funds that we give to sport are targeted to the best benefit of schools. The report on how "Raising the Game" has been implemented, which is to be published next month, will also show how the sportsmatch scheme has taken them up. I have already mentioned how the Sports Council is devoting more money to sport, and new money is also being provided. Sportsmatch is a scheme half-funded by the Government whereby local sports groups—they might be schools—and local businesses get together to provide matching funding for valuable grass-roots schemes. It is one of our best managed schemes.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I can give my hon. Friend a perfect example of how the sportsmatch scheme is helping the grass-roots of sport. We have a brilliant new clubhouse for Malton and Norton rugby union football club on a new pitch on a new site. Sportsmatch provided £9,000 for floodlights, which was matched by £9,000 from local businesses. It means that in the winter months youngsters can train at rugby as well as the first and second XV.

Mr. Sproat: That is an extremely good example, which could be paralleled around the country. Only last week I was at a sportsmatch reception where scores of groups of young people and the businesses supporting them came together. At the time of "Raising the Game", sportsmatch agreed to set aside about a third of its money for school sports projects. In fact, it has done even better and gave some £1.8 million to about 200 projects last year. Half of that is old money redirected and half is new money from sponsorship.

I do not want to go into great depth about the national lottery although I am happy to go into as much detail as the House wants. However, we know that one of the problems with lottery money for schools is that it is extremely difficult for schools to raise the matching money. The general assumption might be that half of any money must come from outside or local sources and half from the lottery, but it was difficult for schools to find their half for any particular project. That was especially so for some inner-city schools. The Sports Council has said that from this autumn onwards projects for sports in schools can be funded up to 80 per cent. from the lottery. We learn by experience and make adjustments to achieve what we want without tying ourselves down with idiotic, bureaucratic regulations that bear little relation to life as it is lived.

When the report is published, the House will see what we have done about the difficult and contentious issue of the sale of school sports fields. It is my belief that although the Government gave schools the freedom to sell land with the best of intentions—in many cases, those good intentions were fulfilled—one of the unforeseen consequences was that too many acres of school sports grounds were sold. I am not making a party political point, and I do not see the Opposition spokesman jumping to his feet—I hope that he would not. The Government acted with the best intentions and the scheme was taken up by Labour councils which sold as many playing fields as any other councils. We all sometimes do things without foreseeing the consequences, and this was the case with school playing fields.

We put the matter out to consultation, asking whether local authorities, schools and sports organisations would agree that it was sensible that if ever it was proposed to sell school playing fields—there may be occasions when it is the wise thing to do—the Sports Council should be made a statutory consultee so that no school playing field could be sold without the Sports Council being able to say no and, in fact, having a de facto veto on the sale.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way; I shall not intervene again. I am grateful to the Department of National Heritage and to the Department for Education and Employment for saving Elthorne school sports fields in Ealing from being sold by Ealing Labour council. I have to make a political point because I am also trying to save the Great Western

Railway playing fields in west Ealing from development by British Rail or its successors. May I have my hon. Friend's help in this, too?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend and every other hon. Member can have my help in protecting school playing fields when they deserve to be protected. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the campaigns that he has waged to make sure that school playing fields are retained.

I shall make a few final points about schools. I said earlier that one of the most important things is to ensure that boys and girls who have played sport, been good at it or benefited from it do not suddenly drop out of the sporting scene when they leave school. We are extremely keen to strengthen the links between schools and local sports clubs. The Sports Council has said that, from October onwards, it is setting up a challenge fund of some £2 million for which any school and local sports club can bid to fund any particular project to improve those links. Again, money is being retargeted to worthy aims.

"Raising the Game" said—I am paraphrasing, but I am paraphrasing accurately—that by the year 2000 every young person in this country should have good access to good sports facilities. That is a big and important promise, and it is meant to be; it is being carried out mainly through the lottery.

The Sports Council already has its sports fields register up and running. In September, it will begin a detailed audit of all sports facilities in this country, including inside facilities, outside facilities, synthetic pitches, swimming pools and leisure centres. Projects designed to fill gaps in provision will be funded by the lottery so that by 2000, we shall fulfil the promise that every pupil in every school will have access to good sports facilities.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the Minister explain his proposals a little more, especially in terms of how they will help schools in underprivileged and deprived communities? Such schools will find it impossible to raise even 20 per cent. of matching funding for a project because they are raising what funds they can towards basic school provision. Again, schools in such areas simply cannot find the resources to run the schemes once they have been provided.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Again, I say quite openly that we learn as we go along. We set the target for the percentage of lottery funding for many projects too low in certain areas. The Sports Council has responded to that problem. I have mentioned that the percentage of lottery money for all schools projects is now 80 per cent. Even as we speak, however, the Sports Council has lowered the percentage to 10 per cent. for schools, especially for inner-city schools which do not have the money. The council can go further; there is no barrier on it and it can set whatever level of matching funding it wants. It will look at each individual case and see whether it should give more in a particular case.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) also made an important point about running costs. We have loosened the rules so that if it is clear that a capital project will involve running costs, they can be built into the money for that project, whether it is the building of a sports centre or a leisure centre. The costs of lighting, paying a janitor or whatever can be built into the project. The Sports Council will take all those detailed and important matters fully into consideration. An indication of the truth of what I say is how far it is already moving towards fulfilling the need to change the balance between lottery money and outside money. I do not, however, claim that that is the answer in every case and many schools will continue to have difficulty in raising matching funding.

On Tuesday, we shall publish a report by a working group that we set up under the chairmanship of Sir Roger Bannister, the legendary runner. Sir Roger's committee looked at the whole question of sports scholarships at universities. I have described some of the things that we have done to schools because I consider schools the single most important aspect. Sir Roger has looked at best practice in universities, at how they deal with sports scholarships and at what has to be given to sportsmen and women when they come to university, such as special diets and special training facilities. The report goes into detailed points such as the need for accommodation for sports scholars to be relatively near to the sports facilities that they require. It says that they should have guides, advisers and mentors who will take them through their university life.

But—this is a very important point—we are not going down the American road whereby anybody who happens to be good at sport but who may be absolutely thick with an IQ of under 50 gets a sports scholarship. We believe that sports scholars must fulfil the academic side of university life as well as the sporting side. It is an interesting fact, which I cannot say that I realised before I got into all this, that our present sports scholars at university get higher academic degrees than those who are not sports scholars. The discipline that sport imposes works its way through into the academic side. I recommend that hon. Members look at Sir Roger's very detailed, excellent report, for which I thank him most sincerely, when it comes out on Tuesday.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, this month we shall publish the prospectus for the British academy of sport and we shall then invite bids for it. Many groups, ranging from the British Olympic Association to universities and local authorities, have already indicated their interest. Everybody wants to get into the act and I am very pleased about that. Even those who are not part of whatever grouping is eventually chosen for the British academy of sport will have the chance to set up one of the important regional institutes of sport.

We hope that we shall have a decision in November about the British academy of sport. I emphasise that it will be a flagship institution—the best of its kind in the world. It will have the best training facilities, the best coaching facilities, the best sports science, the best sports medicine and the best biomechanics. Residential facilities will be available for athletes who want to stay at the academy and there will be scholarships to keep them there. There will be funding for the coaches. We have looked at all the different institutions in the world that are involved in such work and we have taken the best from each of them. That is what we shall put in our prospectus.

We shall have a pathway all the way from schools, through local sports clubs and local centres of excellence, right up to the British academy of sport. People who believe that their child has a real athletic future will know exactly what the pathway is. It will be properly funded

[Mr. Sproat]

and will have proper provision. There will be better teacher training for the schools and a British academy of sport to give the highest possible standards of facilities, training and coaching. I hope and believe that all that will mean that this country, which invented so many of the sports that are now played around the world and which developed those that we did not invent, will bring sport back to its proper place in national life. I hope that this time next year, we shall have another debate. We shall then publish another report to show what we have done in the preceding 12 months.

10.16 am

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): We rejoice whenever there is a debate on sport, and of course we do so today. However, the debate is once more on a Friday and we know of hon. Members with a keen interest in sport who are unable to be here because of other commitments. I refer particularly to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), who kindly dropped me a note to say that he would not be attending. We all know that he loves sport and that he was a great participant. He has a long-standing engagement, but I am sure that his colleague, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), will be an able substitute and we look forward to hearing his speech.

My long-term adversary, the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), is also unable to attend. He can always be relied on to make a lively contribution. I generally leave the Chamber with a few daggers in my back; at least I shall be saved from that. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) cannot be here because she is away on parliamentary business, so we shall not be able to hear her usual contribution. There are others who cannot attend on a Friday, so it is a shame that the Minister has not been able to break the mould of holding sports debates on a Friday, despite our urging him to do so. Perhaps he will have another go at persuading the Leader of the House so that we can have a larger attendance and, perhaps, more informed speeches as a result.

When the debate was announced, I welcomed it, believing that surely this time the Minister would give us a nugget or two, a gem or two or an idea or two that was different. Alas, we have heard the same old ideas, most of which have emanated from bodies other than the Government. Listening to the Minister, one would have thought that some other party had been in power for the past 17 years. We cannot avoid party politics. It may be regrettable, but we cannot get away from it in a debate of this kind. The Minister used words such as "encourage" and "strongly urge" and we heard, "We shall find out what the Department for Education and Employment is saying." That is all pretty woolly and we expected something different from the Minister. Nothing changes and I will point out later why the Department of National Heritage misses its own targets.

The Minister must not take my remarks personally. We recognise that he at least recognises—he has said so in his speech this morning—that his Government have been pretty awful in this matter. There will have been much rejoicing in heaven as a result of the Minister's conversion on the road to Damascus. The Opposition certainly welcome it.

Today's debate gives us the perfect opportunity to assess the state of sport almost a year after the publication of the Government's document "Raising the Game". I make no apology for blaming the Government for the deficiencies that the Minister highlighted.

The Minister will recall that, when we debated the issue last October, I gave a guarded welcome to some of the measures contained in that document. As I pointed out then, it was a patchwork quilt of good ideas, but it lacked overall strategic direction. Nothing has changed since then, despite the Minister's speech. In any case, the good ideas contained in the document were stolen from various bodies apart from the Labour party—the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the British Olympic Association, the National Playing Fields Association and the Sports Council. At least it was a start. After 17 years in power, having blamed everybody but themselves for the state of British sport, the Government finally issued a paper and, to be fair to the Minister, he has outlined out some of the deficiencies.

Some might say that it is better late than never, but we were promised a White Paper. In last year's debate, the Minister gave a spurious reason why the document was not a White Paper—that a White Paper would be too expensive for many people to buy—but that did not fool anyone in the sports world. The Government clearly intended to send a glossy document free of charge to as many people as possible, in the hope that they would not rumble the fact that the ideas were not the Government's own. As I said in last year's debate, we do not mind the Government pinching other people's ideas—indeed, we welcome it—but they should at least acknowledge them.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He might be interested in the reaction of one leading sports administrator to the Labour press release earlier this week. That very distinguished gentleman said:

"There is nothing new in Labour's proposals. They can't have read the Government document. They are trying to make political mileage out of nothing."

The hon. Gentleman hijacks responses to Government documents because he has nothing new to say.

Mr. Pendry: We do not know who that distinguished gentleman is. I was coming to the point that the hon. Gentleman raised earlier and has now raised again. We were told that the Government would be following up the document next month with "Raising the Game 2". It will give details of the progress that has been made in the past year. If that is the case, it will be shortest document ever published by any Government—not that there has been any unwillingness to assist the Minister on the part of teachers, parents, the voluntary sector, sports governing bodies, local authorities or any of the myriad of other groups providing sporting opportunities for young people. What is missing is the Government's commitment to back up even the meagre promises that they made in "Raising the Game".

What has been done in the past year? In March, the Minister decided that it was a good idea to release a press statement giving details about the progress that has been made so far. Let us examine what he said. The Minister promised a survey of sporting provision in schools to be published in April. Now we are told that it will appear on 15 July. Of course, we are still waiting for that survey. Given the slippages that have occurred in the past, we would be surprised if it came out on 15 July.

The Minister promised, following consultation, to make the Sports Council a statutory consultee on playing field sales, but the town and country planning legislation has yet to be amended accordingly. In any case, is the Sports Council the right body to act on playing field sales? It is, after all, a Government quango; surely a more independent body, and one dedicated solely to promoting the use of recreational space, would be the National Playing Fields Association.

The Minister promised more emphasis on team games when he knows full well that three quarters of the responses to the Government's consultation paper on making competitive games compulsory at key stage 4 were opposed to the idea. Even *The Daily Telegraph* considered that proposal to be clearly wrong.

The Minister promised extra support for élite athletes. That is a good idea, not least because it was proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who, as long ago as October last year, urged the Secretary of State to set up talent funds. It can be found in the *Official Report* of 25 October at column 1032.

The Minister will also remember that I wrote to him last year asking for more support for our top athletes. Although it is warming to know that the Government are paying close attention to our speeches and letters, it is a pity that the Minister did not respond to our initiative more quickly. Had he done so, the talent fund could have been up and running in time to help our athletes who are flying the flag in Atlanta this summer. Because of the Government's delay, however, gifted athletes will not have access to the funds until next January. That is an absolute disgrace. It will be far to late to help competitors who are in need now. I have written to the Minister urging him to assist further, but I have yet to receive a response and it certainly was not forthcoming today.

The Minister also promised a national junior sports programme. I welcome the Sports Council initiative to encourage participation by youngsters; however, that will put extra demand on Sports Council finances at the same time as the Government have knocked £2.3 million off the Sports Council's budget. The Government have demonstrated their support for grass-roots support by cutting the funding to a much praised initiative to which the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) referred—the sportsmatch scheme—by 15 per cent. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make representations to the Minister about that. The Government's real agenda is to give with one hand and take away with the other.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman say where when he stands on team games? He seems to avoid commenting on team games while criticising what others have said. Where do he and his party stand?

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Gentleman generally takes a close interest in such matters; I am surprised, therefore, that he missed those gems from the Labour party. The Opposition have always been in favour of team games. However, we are not in favour of compulsory team games. We have always said that there should be a mix of games within schools. When certain Labour local authorities rejected the idea of team games, we made strong representations to them.

It is all right for the Minister to recognise the fundamental truth of the importance of sport in schools, but the Government's record fills me with dismay. As the Minister said, it is the most important part of the sport pyramid where children first learn about sport and develop their interest in physical activity, yet it is the weakest link in the Government's sport chain. That may well have something to do with the Department for Education and Employment.

Let us look at the facts. The latest annual report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools noted that in more 40 per cent. of primary schools, PE standards were not sound. That is backed up by the latest Office for Standards in Education report on physical education. Inspectors found:

> "Many primary schools teachers lack subject knowledge in physical education and are not confident that they can meet the requirements of the National Curriculum . . . Very few schools have adequate changing facilities."

The position does not improve by the time children reach secondary school where, according to the same report

> "Many schools have dirty changing rooms in a poor state of repair with inadequate facilities for showering."

What progress have the Government made over the past year to improve the conditions and standards in those schools? I suggest that it is very little. The Minister spoke about PE teachers. There are no free-standing physical education colleges left in Britain. According to the Health Education Authority and the Sports Council, the number of PE teachers has almost halved from 41,800 in 1977 to just 24,000 in 1992. What measures are the Government implementing to increase the number—the hon. Gentleman never mentioned numbers—of PE teachers back to the pre-1979 level? Surely that would be of major benefit to British sport.

The Secondary Heads Association reported that between 1987 and 1994 there was a decline of more than three quarters in extra-curricular sports fixtures mainly due to the increased work loads of teachers implementing the national curriculum. The Ofsted survey of good practice of PE in schools reports:

> "Any failure to regain fully the position of the early 1980s resulted from the decision of many non-specialist teachers in secondary schools not to return to involvement in extra sporting activities."

Since then, there has been yet another threat to extra-curricular school sports. I hope that the Minister is listening, because he must be aware of the statement made by the National Union of Teachers on 20 May threatening to boycott extra sporting activity. If he remembers, I brought it to his attention in Question Time on that very day and urged him to be proactive and bring together teachers and local education authorities to resolve the potentially damaging dispute.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No.

The Minister did not reveal at that Question Time what his Department was doing about the problem, but he promised:

[Mr. Pendry]

"We shall have a chance to return to that and other matters when we have a sports debate on Friday 7 June."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1996; Vol. 278, c. 11.]

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Pendry: Here we are in the sports debate to which the Minister referred. I would welcome news on what action—the Minister promised it—he has taken in the meantime. As far as I am aware, he has done nothing. He has left teachers to resolve or attempt to resolve what could be a very damaging dispute.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Order.

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Gentleman is not the Speaker. Perhaps that is what he is aspiring to—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) has a very long way to go before he reaches the office of Speaker.

Mr. Pendry: I did not realise that it was one of my hon. Friends who was trying to intervene. I am sorry; my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr Banks) could intervene any time.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Pendry: I shall give way to the hon. Lady because so far she has been very promising in this debate. She has been very penetrating and asked the Minister intelligent questions. I hope that she is as unhappy about the answers as I am.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does the hon. Gentleman think that teachers should be paid extra for extra-curricular work, or should they regard such work as part of their professional duty, just as a doctor or a lawyer would do work outside the normal requirements? Does he believe that teachers should be regarded as professionals and not demand extra money, or would he like to give them more money and, if so, how much? I would appreciate it if the hon. Gentleman would give costings on how such payments would affect the overall teaching budget.

Mr. Banks: Another penetrating question.

Mr. Pendry: Yes, but not so helpful. If the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) were to read some of the documents—as the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who is soon to be a candidate somewhere else and has stopped making so many references to Blackpool in his speeches, obviously has—she would know that we have already said that we believe that teachers, who have gone through some damaging hoops as a result of the changes in Government education policy, should be recognised for that extra work. We would be rather more proactive than the Minister's Department in having talks with the Department for Education and Employment about resolving the problem. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are being particularly naive.

The Secondary Heads Association has also produced evidence of a sharp decline in the amount of PE played in schools. In 1987, 72 per cent. of 14 to 16-year-olds did at least two hours of PE a week. By 1994, the figure had fallen to 25 per cent. The Government have made a wishy-washy commitment that all schools should—not must—offer at least two hours of PE a week. How many schools are able to deliver that promise today? Perhaps the Minister could tell us. I should like to contrast that with our commitment. We have said clearly that there should be a minimum of two hours' sport a week in the national curriculum, which is far more than the wishy-washy talk of the Minister.

What about playing fields? The Minister was very brave and raised the subject in his speech. He said that I was not jumping up and down, and I was not because he knows my position full well. I have raised the subject, but the Minister has still not answered my point. We all know that the Government like to pretend that the Department of Education and Science circular 909 has protected playing fields. The reality, of course, is the exact opposite.

Since the circular was introduced way back in 1981, the statutory minimum size of playing fields has been reduced, and, consequently, 5,000 have been sold off. Admittedly, Labour-controlled authorities as well as Conservative-controlled authorities have been given the option as a priority. Some authorities consider social services and other things a higher priority than the opportunity to sell playing fields. We will not give that opportunity to any council, whatever its complexion. We are going to scrap circular 909 so that nobody will be tempted to sell playing fields.

The Government have induced more playing field sales this year. Under regulations that they introduced in April after "Raising the Game", grant-maintained schools have been allowed to keep the full proceeds of asset sales—a policy that the National Playing Fields Association described as having

"an inadvertent negative impact on school playing fields."

It went on:

"The simple position is that the only assets that schools have available for disposal are buildings and land and for the major part most buildings will continue to be required."

My research shows that a further 2,600 playing fields are under threat of development. That is some progress. A large number of playing fields that remain are being neglected because of a lack of resources in schools. According to Ofsted, a third are in poor condition, and poorly drained, badly maintained or distant pitches have a particularly adverse effect on certain sports in school. Many are a positive danger to our youngsters. One set of pitches where I took some former international footballers were in such a state of disrepair that they stated categorically that they would not allow their kids to play on them because it would ruin their careers before they had even begun.

I fully understand if such facts have escaped the attention of hon. Members because the information has not been made available. More than two years ago, on

12 January 1994, I was promised in a parliamentary answer that the national register of playing fields would be provided in the Library on disk. That would have made the information accessible to all Members. Unfortunately, it has yet to appear, and we have to go to the Sports Council to get the required information. When I have raised the matter with successive Ministers, I have been promised that the information would be made available in the Library in due course. I hope that, in his winding-up speech, the Minister will give a guarantee that the register will be made available to all in the Library without any further delay. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have a right to know what is happening in their constituencies. That is the real record of sport in Britain under the Government. We should judge the Government by their deeds and not by their words.

I should like to make another helpful suggestion to the Minister. If he wants to make the revised document more substantial and put meat on its bones, he should consult in the first place those from whom he hijacked ideas when he was formulating "Raising the Game" and, more important, talk to those whom he did not consult when drawing up the document.

Perhaps the Minister could make a start by having a word with local authorities. Despite being the largest providers of sport and leisure opportunities, spending more than £1.25 billion annually—25 times as much as the Sports Council—they received only a single fleeting reference in "Raising the Game". Local authorities could express their continuing concerns over the loss of the regional councils for sport and recreation and the two-way linkages that they provide between national, regional and local policy makers and providers. They could alert the Minister to the crucial role of local authority sports development officers, who act as a link between schools and clubs.

My council, Tameside, has been at the forefront of developing such initiatives by taking on a leisure education officer, employed by the education department but seconded to leisure services specifically to develop links between schools, communities and clubs. The Minister would do well to talk to officers and councillors on that council, and I would give him some contact numbers if he wanted them.

If the Minister does not want to head as far north as Tameside, he could follow my example and visit Haringey or Kent county councils' sports development units. Those excellent councils have set up schemes to increase sporting opportunities for their local communities.

Kent's unique project involves the county council working in partnership with local district councils, the Sports Council and the National Coaching Foundation, as well as voluntary, educational and commercial interests. Its aim is to promote sport throughout the county, focusing on facility development, enhanced coaching and higher levels of performance.

Those people would also urge the Minister to promote the dual use of facilities and open them up to wider community use, but that further development is being put in jeopardy, because of local management of schools and grant-maintained schools.

On a brighter note, I was pleased to see that in the Conservatives' local election publication, "Look", praise was heaped on some of the magnificent stadium facilities being developed around the country, such as the McAlpine stadium in Huddersfield, the New Den at Millwall and Middlesbrough's magnificent new Riverside stadium. I should add that all those benefited from local football clubs' being able to work in partnership with the private sector and, of course, with their Labour local authorities.

Could the Minister have a word with the disabled groups, which have produced some of our finest international sportsmen and sportswomen—

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: On that point?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, as it happens, on that point.

I am stimulated to say that I am glad that at long last, one hour and 10 minutes after it began, the debate is arriving at football. So far, we might have been forgiven for not realising that we are on the eve of the biggest sporting event to be held in this country for 30 years.

However, it is in no spirit of animus that I intervene on the hon. Gentleman. By all means let him say, with reference to those three new stadiums, that the football clubs concerned benefited from consultations with their Labour councils; but if we are to make such points, can we please deal with the subject properly? What about the councils at Portsmouth and Southampton, where clubs with derelict grounds wish to rebuild them? And what about what happened at Southend? I am not making a party point, because I cannot remember which party controls Southend, where—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is now beginning to make a speech. He will have to contain himself until his turn comes.

Mr. Mellor: I shall, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) knows the point that I am making—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman must resume his seat now.

Mr. Pendry: I accept what you say, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman was attempting to make a serious point, which I have covered before, and it concerns us. I must tell him that the councils that he mentioned are, of course, Conservative councils which have blocked the developments—but there is a bigger and much more important point than a party political point to be made on the subject.

Hon. Members: Southampton is Labour.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): The development would be outside the city of Southampton.

Mr. Pendry: I do not wish to be diverted, although I would willingly engage in that conversation with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), a former Minister, who, I must say, was so important to football when he was in office. I gave way to the right

[Mr. Pendry]

hon. and learned Gentleman because I thought that he intended to refer to the disabled groups. That is why I asked whether he wanted to intervene on that point.

May I return to that most important subject—*[Interruption.]* I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) to listen too. I know that he will attempt to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. He knows his stuff, but I want to talk about the disabled groups now, because they are very important, and clearly they have not been included in the Minister's thinking.

As I was saying, those groups have produced some of our finest international sportsmen and sportswomen, whose achievements were not mentioned at all in "Raising the Game". Local government may have had one reference, but there was no mention at all of our disabled sports people. They are athletes of whom the nation should be proud, and I hope that they repeat their successes in this year's paralympic games. I shall certainly be cheering them on in Atlanta.

If the Minister were to ask those people, they would tell him of the need to appoint a representative on the United Kingdom Sports Council. He could assist in doing that, but he has chosen not to do so. There is also the British Sports Forum. I understand that the British Paralympic Association has written to the forum asking to be represented, but has been rejected. Perhaps the Minister could intervene to find out why it has been excluded. I understand that as yet he has failed to do so.

The two omissions that I have mentioned are the two clearest omissions from the original document. I would welcome assurances from the Minister this morning that he has fully involved both the disabled groups and the local authority associations in the revised edition of "Raising the Game" that we expect. In all likelihood, he will not be able to give those assurances, because so far as I am aware there have been no consultations whatever between him and either local authority associations or disabled groups. If that is so, it is disgraceful.

If someone had consulted the disabled groups, it would have saved the Government the embarrassment of producing the "Practical Guide for Disabled People", just published by the Department of Social Security, which contains totally incorrect information about the governing bodies of disabled sport.

The Minister will be aware that the Labour party has produced a blueprint showing how we envisage the new British academy of sport, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South. Our blueprint was the result of a detailed consultation process with all the major organisations in British sport, and was launched last month to much acclaim from the world of sport.

We see a central academy providing generic services such as sports medicine and science, skill co-ordination, research and development, and so on. It would co-ordinate the activities of an enhanced network of services, focusing on the existing national centres of excellence.

Of course, as the Minister knows, the idea of a British academy was contained in the Labour Government's White Paper, so at least the principle is not a party issue. The Opposition recognise that there is no point in ignoring the achievements of what is already in place. We need to develop an integrated approach, and we can build on the strengths of the existing structure, and involve other areas of excellence.

The Minister could well join Steve Cram, the former world distance record holder, who does not apologise for putting his name to the idea, and Michael Whittingham, the British athletics coach, as well as the National Coaching Foundation, the Institute of Professional Sport, the Physical Education Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the British Paralympic Association, and many others. On the day of our launch, we heard that the Minister was in line with our proposals, and he would have us believe that he has supported a similar proposal all along. He said so again this morning.

I shall quote from the Minister's article in *The Daily Telegraph* of 5 December last year, in which he outlined his vision of a single-site academy:

> "The Academy will be situated on, say, a 200-300 acre, greenfield site. It could be anywhere in the country but it would probably be best if it was reasonably central geographically and easily accessible. There would be accommodation for some 500 top athletes and their coaches. These athletes and their coaches could live full time at the Academy".

I say to the Minister, out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.

There was no mention at all of an enhanced network of activities, but that is hardly surprising. A spanking brand new academy with high-tech facilities and all mod cons, built on a green-field site of up to 300 acres, with full-time accommodation for up to 1,000 athletes and coaches, would take all of the £100 million allocated.

The Minister was clearly setting out his own vision of the academy before the consultation. From our own wide consultation process we discovered that the main problem of the existing structure is the fact that the centres are disparate and their activities lack clear co-ordination.

Mr. Tony Banks: Surely the academy does not have to be on a green-field site. There are many institutions that could be adapted to accommodate the sports academy. I believe that there is an excellent site in Redbridge, for example, for which proposals are being put forward. Perhaps my hon. Friend thinks that that would be a good idea.

Mr. Pendry: My hon. Friend is right. The academy does not have to be on a green-field site, and we do not say that it should be. We are saying that other areas could be considered for the academy, which would be slimmed down compared with what the Minister set his heart on at the beginning.

We all want our teams and individual athletes to achieve Olympic gold and to win international tournaments, so the headquarters should co-ordinate the United Kingdom strategy for excellence. To my mind, the best way of achieving excellence is by producing a national strategy delivered locally.

The ball is firmly in the Minister's court. We know that he has received the responses to the consultation paper back from the Sports Council, but that up to now he has been reluctant to publish them. When they are published, we shall welcome that very much. As he knows, I have re-tabled some specific questions to him about the academy. Late last night he faxed me a letter, with which

I shall not bore the House—but it is clearly a bit of a whitewash. We shall return to the subject in the near future.

Of course we must produce athletes to win—but not to win at all costs. I am pleased that Diane Modahl has now been cleared completely, but her case highlighted public concern about the use of drugs in sport. Unfortunately, that subject is likely to feature on the agenda at the Olympics this summer. I was concerned to read recently that the number of sportsmen and women failing drugs tests carried out by the Sports Council this year had risen by 15 per cent. over previous years.

Back in 1988, the then Home Office Minister—the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg)—committed the Government to bringing anabolic steroids within the remit of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and the Minister gave the House an undertaking during the last sports debate that the Home Secretary would shortly bring that about. Shortly afterwards, I tabled a question to ask what had been done. The Minister again said that the Government would follow the advice of their advisory committee and would control steroids very soon. But nothing was done until April, when the Government announced that they were outlawing the supply—but not the use—of steroids. The House will want to know why the Government have done a U-turn, as that is extremely important.

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney said that he was surprised that the European championships had not been raised so far in the debate, but I now wish to refer to the tournament. We are on the brink of the greatest sporting event to be held in this country for 30 years. The excitement generated by Euro 96 is palpable, and it is a great tribute to the perseverance of the football authorities, fans, the Football Trust, the police and local authorities that we are able to stage it at all, and their continuing hard work throughout the tournament will make Euro 96 the success it deserves to be.

The contrast between the efforts of those organisations and the neglect of the Government could not be greater. It is worth taking a few minutes to recall the lack of interest shown by the Government in the event right from the beginning. The Minister may recall that the launch of the bid for Euro 96 was held here in the House of Commons, shortly before the last general election. Because of the Government's lack of interest, it was left to me as the then chairman of the all-party football group to assist the FA in arranging for the then leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Neil Kinnock, to launch the bid with Sir Bert Millichip, Tom Finney and other football luminaries.

That was followed by the Open Goal conference in Birmingham in September 1994, organised by the shadow National Heritage team. Opposition Members were concerned that, two years after the bid was made, the Government were still not providing a strategic direction for the promotion of the tournament. The conference brought together for the first time the eight local authorities where matches were to be held, supporters groups, politicians from all parties, the FA, the Football Trust and all the other main players in the game—apart from the Government.

The lack of Government involvement in the championships cannot bode well for any future attempt by this country to host major sporting events, such as the Olympic games or the World cup. The international community does not expect to see the host Government sitting on the sidelines doing nothing. As far as I am aware, the Secretary of State has met only once with representatives of the host cities to discuss their concerns about the championships. That was on 29 April this year—barely six weeks before the start of the tournament.

That reveals a lack of leadership and direction from the Government. The best word that I can think of to describe their approach is "muddled". I would like to have seen serious Government backing from the off. The Secretary of State or the Minister should have been proactive and formed a committee to co-ordinate the tournament. The Government should have used the championships as a showpiece to show the world that Britain can host major sporting events in style. The championships could also have highlighted Britain as a prominent tourist destination. The tournament will attract between 250,000 and 300,000 foreign visitors, and the Treasury is expected to benefit by £8 million in increased VAT receipts from ticket sales alone. That is before the extra revenue that will be generated from the additional £100 million that the visitors will spend here in England.

The impression with which some of these visitors will leave our shores disturbs me. I was shocked to discover, for example, that North East Regional Railways was advising people going to matches not to travel by train, and there was not a peep from the Government to dissuade the company. That is a direct result of privatisation and the break-up of the national railway system. Regional operating companies now have only a fixed number of carriages and these cannot be moved around the country to meet extra demand.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Pendry: If the hon. Gentleman cannot see that, he should not be sitting where he is.

That is a terrible advertisement for Britain. I was equally concerned to learn that the operating companies have no plans to put on late trains to transport people between major cities after late-night matches. One of the most enticing fixtures in the first stage is the evening game between Italy and Germany at Old Trafford, which is already a 55,000 sell-out. But fans travelling to Manchester from London to watch the match would have to leave the ground as soon as they arrived to catch the last train home. I telephoned British Rail yesterday, and was told that the last train back to London would leave Manchester at 8 pm.

The Government have been begrudging in their financial support to promote the championships. They have guaranteed just £100,000 in direct grants to share among the eight cities, all of which are Labour controlled. Mathematics was not my strong point at school, but I can work out that that amounts to a paltry £12,500 for each city—barely enough to promote a local five-a-side competition, let alone the largest sporting event to be held on these shores for 30 years.

The Minister states that he has met the demands of the cities, but he has not. When representatives of the cities met the Secretary of State's predecessor, they requested £1.5 million, which would have produced a real festival to celebrate the championships. They were turned down, but came back with a more modest proposal for £400,000

[Mr. Pendry]

with no strings attached, but they were given £100,000 in direct aid. It is true that other money has been made available, but it comes with strings attached, requiring host cities to jump through hoops backwards. Local authorities have had to be careful in their selection of sponsors so that they do not conflict with the FA's main sponsorship partners. The Government's stinginess contrasts with the last time we hosted a comparable major event—the 1966 World cup. At that time, Harold Wilson's Labour Government provided £500,000 for hospitality and other measures—the equivalent of £5 million at today's prices.

Despite the lack of central support, the cities have been getting on with it and involving the private sector to organise an exciting cultural and social programme for visiting supporters. The highlights include Newcastle's EuroFest, a specially constructed welcome village close to St. James's park, with bars, bistros and eateries with a European flavour. Liverpool's comedy festival will include some well-known comics from all over the country. Manchester's united clubs of Manchester scheme is based on the city's internationally renowned nightclub scene, and Leeds has the music, fire and masks festival. Some of my hon. Friends will talk about Sheffield and other cities if they catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am sure that the Minister would wish to join with me in congratulating the cities on their inventiveness, despite the inappropriate lead from the Department. The host cities have dug deep into their own pockets to fund this social extravaganza. It is estimated that the entire cultural and social programme put on by the cities will cost some £2.5 million. The Government have funded less than 2.5 per cent. of that directly.

As there are more hon. Members here than I had envisaged—bearing in mind attendance at some Friday debates in the past—I shall conclude by telling the Minister that we all realise that he has been active in trying to persuade some of his colleagues to have a more enlightened policy for sport. He knows that, when I criticise him, it is because he leads for the Government as a whole on sport. There is scope for improvement in the Government's approach, but the Opposition will assist constructively wherever we can.

I shall conclude on a happy note on which we can all agree. We hope that England and Scotland do well in the championships and that there is good behaviour both on and off the pitch from players and fans. We hope that one or other of the teams reaches the final and wins the cup. Having been critical of the Minister—but more critical of the Government—I wish to thank him for giving us the opportunity to have this debate on sport and I look forward to hearing the speeches in the debate.

10.58 am

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I, too, am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. It is timely that we have a debate on sport on the eve of the European championships, with the Olympic games coming up, and the day after we learn of television companies being willing to pay three quarters of a billion pounds for the rights to cover the premier league. It is also timely, because a number of key sports are in a state of flux—who can say what the future of rugby will be—and because of the crisis in one of our other national games, cricket, although some of those who run it do not seem to realise that.

There is a tremendous interest in sport nationwide—even the broadsheets are devoting many more pages to sport than they do to the coverage of other topics. Whether that is a good or bad thing, I leave others to decide, but it is clearly a testimony to the tremendous national interest in sport. Although this will be a good-quality debate because several of those present are committed to sport, it is regrettable that we cannot attract more than 20 Members to debate a subject that lots of people in the country regard as extremely important.

In relation to Euro 96, we should be proud of the fact that the championships are here, whether we love football or not. We should be ambitious for sport in Britain. We should want to host great championships. What is the point of thinking about having a great new national stadium, upgrading our facilities and having the vision if we do not want other people to come and share it with us?

We should be aware of the interest in the championships—400 million people were supposed to have tuned in merely to watch the draw for the event. It is a great shop window for Britain and a way of showing ourselves off. In some senses, we come to the championships quite strongly because as a result of legislation, money being available from the Football Trust, and a great sense of leadership from several key people in football, including a number of club chairmen who embraced the Taylor report and did not allow their fans to drive them from it, we now have some of the finest stadiums. In fact, the chairman of the UEFA grounds committee said that British stadiums are now the best in Europe. We can be proud of that.

I hope that we can be proud of a lot of the other arrangements for the championships. I do not want to get involved in partisanship, but I would like to have seen a bit more vision about some of the things that could have been done around the championships. I would like to have seen some effort made to bring local authorities, national Government and others together to try to give people a good time.

I am not seeking to make a party point, but if there is any element of embarrassment that the championships are going on, that is foolish. We should be proud of the fact that we are hosting them. That is not to say that there will not be some problems, but we must remember that although we think that we have exclusive ownership of football hooliganism, we do not. At one of the European club finals this year, 200 people were arrested and someone was severely injured. Many of the fans who are coming from other countries have never in their adult lives observed a game where there have not been cages between them and the pitch. There could be problems, but I hope not.

It is right that the police have taken pre-emptive action. One of the most impressive things about policing recently has been the way in which the police have worked together with the clubs. The use of closed circuit television, which takes shots of hooligans, means that no one can feel that he can get away with it any more. It is a fundamental proof of the basic rule of law and order that the greatest deterrent is the certainty of being caught. What the police did up in Northumbria was worth while.

I cannot pretend to be all that optimistic about what will happen on the pitch. We shall travel hopefully, whether we arrive or not. The key thing is that by the end of the championships, I want people to see Britain not as a country beset by mad cow disease and all manner of problems—a country that people can have a laugh at—but as one where people can see that we are capable of organising something. I want us to be seen as a warm, friendly and successful country, which can be trusted with handling other great sporting events. I hope in my lifetime to see an Olympic games back in this country. Everyone should have that ambition, because there is no point in being successful in world sport unless one has the ambition to play such a role.

My hon. Friend the Minister focused on two issues in his speech, and although it could be open to the criticism that there was a great deal more that he could have said, I understand why he focused on those two things. He has a deep, personal commitment to them, for which I commend him, and which I share.

How can we expect to be a major cricketing nation when all the evidence suggests that just a third of United Kingdom schoolboys can actually play cricket at school? It is devastating that that should be the case. I do not want to apportion blame for that, but it is self-evident that, if people are not introduced to the game, how can they be expected to play it well?

Sometimes an anecdote tells the story a great deal more effectively than a lot of statistics. I was speaking at one of the big football grounds in the north of England, and one of the managerial staff came to collect me from the airport. He was one of those people, and we produce them, who was equally as good at football as at cricket. It was a marginal call for him whether he went into professional football or professional cricket. He chose professional football because the pay and conditions were better. We talked about sport and he said, "You know, my kids are equally as good at football as at cricket, but they can play only football at school. I discovered that they were good at cricket only because I play it with them in our back garden."

We must do something about that, because we shall not win test matches on the playing fields of Eton; we shall win them on the playing fields of Brixton. There are not many playing fields in Brixton, but we must organise that and do something about it. My hon. Friend's determination to ride over objections from wherever they come, whether they are problems with the teaching unions or whatever, is welcome. We have a national interest in making sure that youngsters play sport at school.

That aim goes beyond producing those who will be world beaters, although we must aim to produce such people, because it is humiliating when we fail after we all get worked up for an event such as the cricket World cup. We sent down a team and they were the only group of men who ever went to India and did not get the runs. It is deeply depressing and disappointing when we do that. The whole country, even those who do not care about cricket, wants to share in successes. Perhaps the team is getting something back on that at the moment.

The question not only of producing world beaters but of giving youngsters the stimulus and inspiration to get involved in sport is so important because it has other social consequences. I am chairman of the Sports Aid Foundation, which grant-aids athletes from sports that do not pay them a living, even if they are highly successful. One of my governors, Jeff Thompson, from Manchester, is a formidable black athlete who became world karate champion. He said to me, "If I hadn't had sport, I could have ended up in prison like a lot of my classmates did." Jeff is a real role model and he got the MBE for the work that he is doing among youth in the cities of the north.

The key point is that if we do not offer people a positive outlet for their energies and enthusiasm, we get the youngsters we deserve. We have the resources and the commitment to be able to do that, so more power to my hon. Friend's elbow in relation to sport in schools and the creative use of money from the lottery.

We must remember that the Sports Council gets by with a grant of about £40 million, or whatever it has been locked at for many years. Each and every year, £300 million is now coming into sport. I have been critical of the way in which some of the distribution bodies have operated in relation to the lottery, but I doff my hat to the Sports Council, because I have not heard a word of criticism about the way in which it has distributed money. It should be congratulated on showing a safe pair of hands. That money could transform sport at every level, from the grass-roots up.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is an interesting point. At the beginning of his speech, the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the three quarters of a billion pounds that is coming into football through the BSkyB and BBC deal. To what extent can we ensure that a chunk of that money benefits all football, as opposed to just going into the hands of a smaller number of richer clubs?

Mr. Mellor: Football must show an interest in developing the game. I gather that the money that goes to the Football Association for the coverage of the cup final filters down to the county football associations. I do not know whether those associations should have influence over the modern professional game. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who is also an honourable friend. The danger about money coming into football is that all it does is pay for hugely escalating transfer fees and ridiculous wages. We criticise the chap from Camelot who has run a successful lottery that brings in £1.5 billion for good causes. Even with his bonus, he earns £360,000, a third of what my club is paying either Mr. Gullit or Mr. Vialli. I do not object to that, because I am glad that they are playing for Chelsea, but we must get our values right.

The other danger is that football is pricing its grass-roots fans out of the game. I sit behind a microphone every Saturday afternoon during the football season doing a radio show, so I have learnt a thing or two that has been worth learning. For example, a lot of people for whom football is absolutely vital to their lives are feeling that they have been priced out of the game. They cannot afford to go or to take their kids.

Take Euro 96. How many ordinary fans will be able to buy tickets for that? I received tickets for the match between England and Scotland from Synchro Systems. It is even more complicated than applying for shares.

Mr. Banks: Multiple applications.

Mr. Mellor: Exactly. I made only one such application.

[Mr. Mellor]

Some tickets came back. They were priced at £65 and bore the stamp "Severely Restricted View". Who the hell wants to pay £65 for a good view, let alone a severely restricted one? It seems that the football authorities are willing to price the ordinary fan out of the game. Some of the television money should be used to make sections of great stadiums available, relatively inexpensively. If football betrays its grass-root supporters in order to make money, it will not flourish. It should recognise that ordinary folk wish to be at the game. It is not good enough that they watch it on television, although it is helpful that we can all do so.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that not one penny of the BSkyB money will filter through to the game? It will go to the premier league clubs full stop. When my right hon. and learned Friend refers to the FA giving the receipts for a cup final to the clubs at a lower level and through to the counties, we are talking about less than £1 million. Does my right hon. and learned Friend find it difficult to accept that the great television deal will not benefit clubs that are outside the premier league?

Mr. Mellor: Those clubs, of course, have done their own deal.

If premier league clubs receive television money, a good use of it would be not to charge the fans some of the ridiculous prices that have been charged of late. Sections of grounds could be made available to ordinary people through partnership schemes. I am talking of ordinary family people with limited wages, who want to experience live football.

I was involved in an advertisement for Reebok, which was prepared to make a substantial payment to charity. As a football product was being advertised, I thought that it would be sensible to make the money available to football.

When I was a kid growing up in Dorset, I could not go to league football because none was taking place in the area where I was living—at any rate, none worth watching. My constituency is only a couple of miles from great grounds such as Stamford Bridge. Many kids who live a mile or so from great grounds have never been to watch a football game there because they cannot afford a ticket.

With the proceeds from the Reebok advertisement, I was able to take 1,000 kids to their first football match. It happened to be the only occasion during the season when Chelsea scored five goals in a match. We won 5-0. I could not legislate for that. The kids had a fantastic day off. As I said, they live only a couple of miles from the ground, but they are priced out of the market. That must be taken on board when we look for an element of fairness.

I commended my hon. Friend the Minister on what he said about sport and sport education. I commend him also on what he said about a British academy of sport. Let the foot be kept on the accelerator. The concept must not be filtered through so many committees that we end up with a bastardised version of the proposal that does not reflect the clear lines that we have in mind.

The Australians have proved that the academy concept can work. On average, Britain has won five gold medals at all the modern Olympiads. Spain, for example, has put money into developing sportsmen. It did so in the run-up to the Barcelona games. It won more medals at those games than in all the modern Olympiads put together. That demonstrates that if we invest in sports people, we can have an effect on their performance.

The population of Australia is only 40 per cent. of that of the UK. The Australians are aiming for 60 medals—20 of them gold—at the Sydney games. They will win those medals because they have laid the necessary foundations. Let us do the same. It is not enough, however, merely to lay foundations, or to talk about doing so. We must get things up and running.

When I went to the last Olympic games, I met Chris Boardman, who won Britain's first gold medal at cycling for 70 years. Chris Boardman won his gold medal before he went out on the track. He had a bike that was the envy of all the other participants in the race. He also had a trainer and a sports psychologist. That boy was primed up. He believed in himself and he was ready to go. He managed to win a gold medal despite there being no velodrome in Britain of an Olympic standard. His victory was a tribute to the special things that had been done for him. If those things can be done for him, they can be done for others.

Sometimes we disgracefully neglect our sports people. For example, Steve Redgrave has won three rowing gold medals. He has won a gold at each of the last three Olympics. I think that he and Matthew Pinsent have been unbeaten for three seasons. There is every likelihood that they will win a fourth gold medal. Steve nearly packed in rowing after the Barcelona Olympics. He became fed up with having to sponge off his wife. He wanted to be sponsored and to receive proper money.

Steve Redgrave is as great an athlete as Linford Christie. We know, of course, that Linford is a great athlete who runs in blue riband events that attract a great deal of sponsorship. Those who make those sums available are not prepared similarly to make them available to rowing and many other events.

There are two worlds for Olympic athletes. In one world, there are those who can use their skills—jolly good luck to them—to make an extremely good living, apart from enjoying prestige. There are others whose gold medals have been equally hard won but who live in a sporting world that does not attract any form of commercial backing.

Wearing my hat as chairman of the Sports Aid Foundation, I say that we are the only country in the world where the costs of sustaining the training efforts of athletes fall on private individuals and organisations and are not met by the public purse. I pay tribute to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Before taking that further, I should say that before I became chairman of the Sports Aid Foundation, the largest grant that it had ever been able to give to any UK athlete of whatever talent was £5,000 a year. It is now possible to pay élite athletes £15,000 to £20,000 a year in training expenses. That is being done on the back of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

The Sports Aid Foundation spends just over £2 million a year. Even if the job that needs to be done is subject to a budget, we need to spend about £9 million or

£10 million a year. I believe that the foundation will get its way, but what is the point of having a national lottery that brings in £300 million a year if everything is spent on buildings, while nothing is spent on preparing the athletes who we want to perform with distinction? Like all other major sporting countries, we should take on the burden of making payments and grants available to promising sportsmen.

I take up the theme of my hon. Friend the Minister of teenagers in sport. The best evidence available to us shows that 80 per cent. of the most highly talented teenage athletes drop out of sport during their teenage years. They do so for various reasons. Some will drop out in any event because we cannot force people to continue, to sweat and to endure various privations. Some teenage athletes, however, drop out because they think that there is not much point in going on. They feel detached from the main-stream of teenage life. They do not think that it is worth while continuing with sport.

It is not only the losers who move away from sport. A short while ago, I had a riveting evening sitting next to one of our most prominent Olympic gold medallists. He told me that the year before he went to university, he nearly gave up sport. He thought, "Why the hell should I be doing this while everyone else is having fun? No one seems to care." He told me that he had no money and that it was a hell of a flog to get to where he wanted to train. We must take those feelings on board.

There are some things over which we as Members have no control. In other words, we do not have a role. A basic willingness, however, on the part of the House to take an interest in sport is fundamental and best serves the interests of our constituents. We should willingly do the things that we can do. We should use lottery money properly. We should create a British academy of sport. We should ensure that the Sports Council and other bodies are staffed with good people. Let us ensure that where we have political influence, it is exercised in favour of the principles in sport in which we believe.

I have the highest regard for the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), as he knows. No one is more tireless in keeping in touch with major sporting people and sporting events. He knows, however, that there is another side to every success. The Alfred McAlpine stadium at Huddersfield is, of course, fantastic. It won a Royal Institute of British Architects award. It is clearly an exceptional building. I quite often visit the New Den at Millwall. Before it was built, the last major football ground to be built in London was Selhurst Park. It was built a year after Wembley stadium had been constructed. Anyone who has been to Selhurst Park will know that the ground is not exactly the last word in luxury.

We should be aware of the role of local authorities. In this context, I care not about their politics but about their attitudes. Some local authorities call on football to run itself properly. They then frustrate football in trying to do so by raising NIMBY-type objections to the creation of new stadiums. That is having a devastating effect on the fortunes of several clubs. Brighton can be quoted in that context.

Mr. Pendry: Briefly, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that there must be better liaison between the Department of National Heritage and the Department of the Environment because, often, the Department of National Heritage wishes to do what he did when he was there—to get on with it and to have stadiums built? It is frustrated by the Department of the Environment calling in plans when perhaps it should try to resolve matters in other ways.

Mr. Mellor: I agree entirely. Exactly that is happening at Fulham, and I think that a Department of the Environment inspector finally cold-boxed the Southampton scheme, so I accept that point.

Many sports are having huge difficulties coming to terms with the modern world. In many, their own way of running things is not exactly the way that one would devise if one were setting them up today. It is ludicrous that the Football Association should be dominated by people from the amateur game. That is no criticism of the amateur game, but it is not especially relevant to some of the big things that we are talking about. I am a great admirer of Bert Millichip, who is the exception and has given good leadership, but in any other game or walk of life, many other people on the FA council would have been pensioned off. All the people on the FA vice-presidents bench are over 80—it is known as death row.

Rugby will have terrible problems as professionalism comes in. The other day, I had the opportunity to interview Mark MacCormack, who in 1960 met a golfer called Arnold Palmer and then a golfer called Gary Player. Mr. MacCormack built up a business that totally transformed the world of golf and then of tennis. Suddenly, little provincial sports changed. Mark MacCormack had to twist the arms of the Wimbledon authorities to persuade them that they should have hospitality tents and such things. The first reaction of the senior president at Wimbledon was, "Would people be interested in coming?"

In 30 years, sport has been transformed. It is now a huge business. Hundreds of millions of people will watch it around the world. We all tune in. The question is, however: are the people who are running sport able to keep up with that? Do we not have a role in the House to assist in that process? Above all, are the interests of the ordinary sports fan being missed out on in this great global battle, where all that seems to matter is the television rights for distant countries, not what is happening on the spot? That is why—and I am sorry if I have spoken too long, Madam Deputy Speaker—it is important that we should debate sport and that we should take it seriously. Other people do. We in the House should.

11.21 am

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I shall confine my remarks to one specific matter because quite a few hon. Members want to speak: policing and hooliganism at the European championships.

I am to be chairman of the all-party Association Football Committee thanks to my hon. Friends. At one of our regularly attended meetings, many of them will have noted that, last week, we met two chief inspectors from Scotland Yard's football intelligence unit. We were impressed by the report given to us by—and I hope that they will not mind me naming them—Chief Inspectors Peter Chapman and Brian Drew of the football section of the special crimes squad. They did a marvellous job in explaining the background to the security and organisation. They came under severe questioning.

[Mr. Joseph Ashton]

The football intelligence unit is not especially new. It has been there for some time. It keeps quiet because, obviously, it does not want to reveal too much of what it knows, but the committee will visit the unit a week on Tuesday. Any Members are welcome to come along if they wish. They will find that it is possible to press a button and hooligans from every club—photographs, details and names—will be revealed on a screen. The unit has acquired a marvellous amount of information and knowledge. It can tell when hooligans will be going to a specific point, what time they will arrive and what pub they will meet at.

It is sad that such information cannot be revealed because of the Data Protection Act 1988. Although it is available to the police, it is not available to clubs. I remember meeting the Home Secretary about this on behalf of the committee following the Lansdowne road incident in Dublin, when thugs from Britain threw chairs off the stand on to the crowd below. To be fair, he conducted a full investigation into it, but still said that the Act means that the identities of potential hooligans cannot be revealed to clubs. The clubs cannot, therefore, check and decide not to give a certain person a ticket or a season ticket or to put stewards on at certain points.

If it is to prevent a crime, the Home Office should examine how this mass of information can be disseminated to clubs and even to area police forces in great detail so that much of the hooliganism—the 1 per cent. of people who create problems, which attract so much publicity—can be curtailed.

Today's *Yorkshire Post* headline reads:

"Police face £1m soccer bill",

and that is just in Leeds and Sheffield, where they are not expecting much trouble. But 7,500 officers have had their leave cancelled. An enormous cost is falling on cities and the Government are offering no extra cash. Millions of pounds will be flooding into the country and there is a chance to put Britain's image in Europe into a far better perspective than the continual squabbles about beef and such stuff, yet we are missing out on it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said, the Government seem to have a non-interventionist policy. They might intervene in football, but in relation to tourism and to putting on a show, they could have done far more.

The football intelligence unit is liaising with several other countries, so not only the British police, but Europe's top cops will be handling things. They know their own hooligans. They will be able to mingle with the crowd and pick them out. Television will be zooming in on and looking for them.

We will not have the position, which has occurred so often, where hooligans are simply put on the next ferry and sent back to their country, knowing that they have got away with it and that they can return even the following week and do it again. Now there will be instant prosecutions. I hope that newspapers will give publicity to such prosecutions.

There is a Europewide network of potential thugs. The vast majority of people who commit such offences are not football fans, but National Front supporters and fascists who have used football to set up a network in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Hamburg, Berlin and throughout Europe. They want to jump on the football bandwagon and to fight world war 3 and world war 4 and they will use any chance that they get. Let us not over-exaggerate it. There are probably no more than a dozen from each country, but they love the publicity and the cameras that zoom in on them, as they did at Lansdowne road in Dublin. They love waving their national flag and abusing it. That is one of the things that could spoil the games.

I tabled a question to the Home Secretary asking him to consider moving the Trooping the Colour ceremony, which, unfortunately—I think that we should have noticed this six months ago—falls on the date of England-Scotland game. Obviously, 20,000 people may come down from Scotland, travelling overnight. I am not saying that they will be exuberant because one or two might have a hangover, but seeing some horses in a parade down the street and the opportunity for mischief and a bit of fun can be tempting.

Mr. Tony Banks: The horsemen will all have swords though.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend keeps interrupting, but I cannot hear what he is saying. It needs only two or three such supporters to think that they can stampede the horses. The television cameras will be there. To those people, it will be great fun, but to the rest of us and for the European championship tournament, it will be a great disaster.

The police are confident that they can handle both events on the same day and I am sure that they can, but it is one thing policing in grounds, which is now a fine art. There has been hardly any trouble in any ground in Britain for many years because of all-seater stadiums, television cameras and segregation. I said this to a director of Sheffield Wednesday football club. We and everyone else have put time and money and gone to great lengths in relation to crowd safety, but on the streets, it can be different. Football is a game of great grief or great joy and if matches finish at half-past nine or half-past 10, supporters go to a pub and someone says a wrong word, trouble can happen.

In these championships, we have a new position. The penalty shoot-out will not necessarily take place. Teams will play extra time until a goal is scored. With the old penalty shoot-out system, the police could get ready at the end of the half hour, with everyone standing up and looking in case of trouble, but now the end of the game can come at any time during the half hour.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am sorry for interrupting my hon. Friend. I was suggesting that if the Scottish supporters decided to make some trouble for Trooping the Colour, they should remember that the troops all have swords. It could be Culloden all over again.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to incidents outside football grounds. It is a matter not just of accidental trouble but of pre-arranged violence. How do we deal with that?

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am old enough to remember the 1966 World cup, when I was serving on Sheffield city council and many things took us by surprise. Supporters adopt a pub, so one will be known as the German pub and another as the Danish pub—and

one cannot stop them going to those pubs with their mates. When it comes to closing time, two or three hooligans say, "Let's go and sort out the German pub." We hope that that will not happen, but it can.

Another problem acknowledged by the police is tented cities. In 1966, Sheffield was caught unawares when armies of youngsters arrived—some of them on push bikes—with tents. They did not have tickets for the game or money to buy them, but they could watch the game in a pub. We let those youngsters pitch their tents in the park. Six hundred people allowed tents in their back gardens. Sheffield and other cities even asked householders to offer supporters bed and breakfast for £12 a night. It is difficult to guard tented cities from hooligans who go looking for a bit of fun, to steal and to cause vandalism. The police are already stretched, and football gets the blame.

Last night, I went to the new football embassy near Piccadilly. Fans get a lot of stick but only a tiny minority cause trouble. The Football Supporters Association received a grant of £50,000 from the Football Trust to establish a football embassy in every town. The embassy at 17 Shaftesbury avenue occupies two floors and is manned by student football supporters who can speak different languages. They can give help with accommodation, and can give advice if one has lost one's money or ticket. The embassy is even publishing handbooks identifying safe pubs and good places to eat.

That scheme will work marvellously well, but it will not grab the headlines. There were hardly any members of the media present last night. If there had been a punch-up, there would have been. Next week, our committee will be meeting the Football Supporters Association to learn more about its plans. The Government should have done something, but they have not. They opted out. One expects the Minister responsible for sport and the Department to take the initiative in welcoming visitors to our country.

The press in this country have their problems. Thousands of people who trained as journalists cannot get a job, or perhaps they had a job and were made redundant. Technology has put them on to the streets. An army of freelance journalists, photographers and cameramen are out of work and get paid only if they can sell a story. That is how they scratch a living. That is why 500 journalists and photographers will turn up to watch the England squad training—hoping that a player will spit or swear.

My fear is that Euro 96 will go wrong because freelance journalists are desperately trying to earn a living in any way they can. Younger freelancers tack on to a bunch of fans and look for a fight—they may even incite a fight. They have a camera handy in their back pockets, to get an exclusive photograph of a window being smashed or a car being turned over which will make the front page—especially if the match is boring. Plain clothes police officers in discos, nightclubs and pubs at the lower end of the scale will be looking for agents provocateur.

The House must remind the newspaper industry that it has a responsibility to project that which is good about Britain, not that which is bad. The media constantly place emphasis on what is bad about politics, football or anything else. If one talks to people in the business about the incident on the flight back from Hong Kong which was said to involve England players, they say that the damage was negligible.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is £5,000 of damage negligible?

Mr. Ashton: It was not £5,000 of damage. I am sure that the hon. Lady has flown club class on long-haul flights, so she will be familiar with the small video televisions that are fitted into the back of the seat. I doubt that they cost 200 quid each. I even doubt that two televisions suffered severe damage.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am astonished. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that appalling behaviour is totally excusable? Is he suggesting that £200 of damage is more acceptable than £5,000 of damage? The fact remains that the men in question behaved appallingly. They were a disgrace to Britain and should have been disciplined. It is outrageous that the hon. Gentleman should try to defend them.

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Lady knows only what she has read in the newspapers, but she condemns and convicts everybody on that basis. Neither the stewards nor stewardesses reported anything to the pilot during the flight in question, and nothing was said for nine hours after the aircraft landed. Then, two cleaners who had entered the aircraft ran to the press to say that there had been some damage. I will not give too many details because libel actions are pending. Some players intend to sue some newspapers for libel, which is why Mr. Venables could not offer a proper explanation. The hon. Lady read the newspaper stories and, like many other people, has jumped on the bandwagon. I hope that there will be an inquiry and libel actions.

Lady Olga Maitland: They did not even apologise.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady knows my views about sedentary interventions.

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Lady asks the players to apologise when they may not have even—

Lady Olga Maitland: They should have made one.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We will start with discipline here, in the House.

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Lady is more gullible than I would expect from a Member of Parliament, and she does not know a lot about football and reporters. Media hype will destroy the games. If that happens, the newspapers will be destroying this country. If the press persist in publishing front-page stories about two idiots having a punch-up or breaking a window, that image will go around the world. Football is not to blame but the people who publicise such incidents out of all proportion.

Mr. Pendry: I have just returned from Hong Kong, where I met the chief of Cathay Pacific. He confirms my hon. Friend's comment that the damage was highly

[Mr. Pendry]

exaggerated, and said that Cathay Pacific's main problem was the British press harassing the airline's girls and putting words into their mouths.

Mr. Ashton: We must not forget the amount of money that has been invested, the organisation, or the wonderful feeling of having the biggest street party in Europe where everybody can have a marvellous time. Young people coming to this country should have that as their first impression of Britain. I remember 1966—it was marvellous, even though it rained for three weeks. It was not just a matter of England winning the cup; it was the marvellous party atmosphere, just like there was at the coronation and on VE day. It could be like that again.

We must get rid of the over-emphasis—and I am sorry that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) fell for it—in the press on tiny incidents that are blown up out of all proportion and destroy everything that sportsmen, politicians and the football movement are trying to do. I appeal to the press not to damage Britain with nonsense stories. Instead, let us all support our country and our team.

11.40 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I could not agree more with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). Like him, I am a vice-chairman of the all-party football committee, which is in no doubt that the police have done sterling work and I pay tribute to them for their efforts.

I begin my speech in my capacity as chairman of the all-party racing committee. When my hon. Friend the Minister opened the debate, he listed the great sporting events that we are going to enjoy in the weeks and months ahead—but I was disappointed to note that he did not mention that it is the Derby tomorrow. There will be a great deal of interest in what is happening at both Wembley and Epsom. We have brought forward the time of the race to 2.25 pm so that people can watch the Derby on television, having, we hope, placed their bets in the betting shops in the morning, and then watch the football afterwards. Large screens at Epsom will show the opening game at Wembley.

Despite the number of welcome initiatives in racing, many of them due to Government help, there is continuing cause for concern about the long-term health of the sport. Racing is both a sport and an industry and the Government have a clear interest in it. For example, they take £350 million a year in general betting duty and there are at least 100,000 jobs in the racing industry, which is inextricably linked with the betting industry. At the other extreme, the breeding and training of horses is a vital part of the rural economy, as those of us with a constituency interest know. In my constituency, the first recorded race was in 1692, when a plate race was run on the wolds just outside Norton. Racing is an important industry that embraces both sport and the economy. The breeding of horses is a £100 million a year industry. Owners pay some £200 million a year in training and veterinary fees and other costs.

The House should be alerted to the fact that racing finances remain in a parlous state. That is despite the help given by the Government with VAT on the cost of bloodstock, the two cuts in general betting duty and the deregulation of some of the betting legislation so that there can be Sunday racing and evening opening of betting shops. In addition, following the recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee, the British Horseracing Board was created. It has done everything possible to improve racing's commercial interests.

You, Madam Deputy Speaker—as a member of the committee—will no doubt remember the work that we did for racing. I pay tribute to the Marquess of Hartington—Stoker, as he is affectionately known in the industry—for the work that he has done with the board. He will retire shortly and will be replaced by my noble Friend Lord Wakeham. The Tote and the Levy Board has been as generous to racing as it can, but betting turnover remains weak. We had looked forward to an increase in the levy, but that has not materialised in the way we envisaged.

I mentioned earlier that training costs amount to some £200 million a year, yet net prize money to owners totals only £38.25 million—barely 20 per cent. of the training costs are recovered in prize money. I am the first to say—as would be many of the owners—that owners are in the business for fun and for sport. In the same way as someone who owns a yacht, they expect to pay for things out of their pockets. However, compared with the prize money in other countries, including just across the channel in France, prize money in Britain is very low and needs to be increased. The Government have recognised that on many occasions.

The Racehorse Owners Association gave a presentation to our committee on Tuesday. It calculates that the deficit between prize money and training costs means that every time an owner has a horse in a race, it costs him £3,000—net of any prize money he may win. That puts the matter into perspective.

In the Budget last year—now enacted in the Finance Act—the Government agreed to make a 1 per cent. reduction in general betting duty. However, that must be seen as a very welcome first step; we need further substantial reductions in this year's Budget. Those in the House who follow the interests of racing will recognise how important that is.

One issue of particular concern is that many small betting shops are closing, often because they are bankrupt. If we allow such shops to close in small market towns there may be a resurgence of illegal betting, which would not be in anyone's interest, especially the Government's. There will be arguments about how any future reduction should be split, but that is a matter for another day.

I come now to football and declare my interest as president of York City football club. It is my personal view that the premier league has been a great success. As has already been said, the premier league and, increasingly, the first division have the finest stadiums in Europe. The tribute for that must go to the Football Trust, one of whose ties I am wearing for the debate. It has given tremendous support. The Government helped to fund the trust's activities, of course, with cuts in pool betting duty.

There is also no doubt that the money that has come into the premier league from the sale of sports rights to BSkyB has enabled clubs to make massive investments in their grounds and to bring in overseas players such as the Bergkamps, Gullits and Cantonas of this world—who also have created great interest in the league. It has provided a tremendous eye-opener for what we will see in Euro 96.

Mr. David Evans: Does my hon. Friend believe that the great success of the premier league has brought about

a situation in which probably only six clubs out of all those in this country are now capable of winning the league or any other domestic trophy? Does he agree with that?

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is right, and he has anticipated the "but" in my speech that I was coming to. I suspect that it is more likely that the big six is the big 10 or the big 12.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I had hoped to catch your eye after the speech of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), because I wanted to congratulate him on the restraint that he showed in his speech by not mentioning the fact that Derby County—his beloved Derby—is now part of that élite. One hopes to goodness that Derby, Sunderland up in the north-east, and—which is the other team that has just been promoted? [HON. MEMBERS: "Leicester City."]—fare rather better than Leicester did last time it was promoted, and Bolton Wanderers did last year.

Mr. Evans: It is going to be tough.

Mr. Greenway: I hear what my hon. Friend says; it will be tough. There is no doubt that the "them and us" between the premier league and the rest of the football league is growing.

Yesterday we heard the announcement about the tremendous expenditure by BSkyB and the BBC on the deal, which is worth approximately £750 million, to screen live matches and highlights. That is another huge input of money into the premier league. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) might have been right in his earlier intervention on the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), when he said that not a penny of that will go to the rest of the football league.

Mr. Evans: He is right.

Mr. Greenway: He may be right. My point is that, if that is the case, it is an absolute scandal. We must impress on the Football Association and on the premier league the importance of ensuring that more of that money goes down to the lower leagues. I think that we can be reasonably assured that, because of the work of the Football Trust and the continuation of the pool betting duty reductions, we will see ground improvements in the lower league.

We now have a big job in ensuring that grounds in the second and third divisions, the Vauxhall Conference and the rugby league clubs are brought up to the same standard as in the premier league and the first division. I think that we can more or less take that as read, although some clubs struggle to find contributions, which the trust recognises.

The real point is that the structure that we have had in this country—there used to be a four-division league—has ensured that we have a bottom-up approach to finding talent rather than a top-down approach. If anyone thinks that we will win Euro 96—I hope to goodness that we do, or that we do well—or that we will win the World cup in two, six or 10 years' time while starving the grass-roots of cash, they are very stupid. I am speaking now only about soccer, but the same applies in many other sports.

One has only to consider that, tomorrow afternoon, David Platt will lead out the England team as captain. He came from Crewe Alexandra. Derby County has a young player—perhaps he is not so young now—Marco Gabbiadini, who started at York City as a junior. There is an argument about transfer fees. The problem in the Bosman case will increasingly affect the value of some of the players.

The thrust of what my hon. Friend the Minister said today about the need to encourage more youngsters is good. However, I stress that I should like more youngsters to be encouraged, and that they should have the determination to play professional soccer for local teams, whether it is York City, Swansea, Fulham or Torquay—four teams that have not done so well—or Luton Town, which we will play next year. We stayed up and, sadly, Luton went down. I shall look forward to it. We will play Watford and Milwall. Those clubs have struggled.

If they are good enough, I should like to see youngsters encouraged and enthused to have a professional career. If we are to improve the facilities and training available to them at the grass-roots, we must give them the opportunity of having a professional career, and then to move up into the premier league. It would be an act of great folly if those clubs were allowed to drift into part-time soccer because of a lack of resources, at a time when there is so much money coming into football because of the premier league deal.

Mr. Ashton: The simple solution would be for smaller clubs to agree to become nursery clubs. There is a strong feeling in the premier league that that system could work—for example, York City could be a nursery club for Newcastle United and Luton for Arsenal. The clubs could help each other and the money would travel downwards. The smaller clubs would provide somewhere for young players to train on their way up and the whole scheme would be of benefit to all concerned, but no one is pushing it.

Mr. Greenway: I know that the hon. Gentleman has advanced that theory before and there is some merit in it. In north Yorkshire, we have York City, Scarborough, Hartlepool, Darlington, Lincoln City, Scunthorpe United and Doncaster Rovers and then Middlesbrough and Leeds United. Not all the smaller clubs can be dormitory or nursery clubs for other teams.

It is marvellous that the three north-east teams will all be in the premier league next year. That has not happened for a long time. The success of Newcastle United means that there is great interest in football in the north-east, and Middlesbrough has a new stadium.

I have made the point as forcefully as I can that two things are needed at the grass-roots of the game: the development of facilities for youngsters—I shall comment on that matter in a moment—and ensuring that the game also thrives in the lower leagues. People will watch Euro 96 on television and I hope that they will be sufficiently enthused to go and watch their local teams come August. That happened in 1966 when we won the World cup—it provided a tremendous boost for attendances at matches all over the country.

I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney is no longer in his place. He made the telling point that kids who live two miles from Chelsea

[Mr. Greenway]

football club cannot get or cannot afford tickets to watch Chelsea but that they would be welcomed with open arms at Fulham, which is not far away. In the same way, if people cannot get tickets to see Leeds United or Middlesbrough, if they cannot travel the distance involved or if parents are unhappy about letting their children go there, we would welcome them with open arms at York City. We are expanding our facilities to build a new family stand so that people can enjoy their football. However, we cannot do it all unless we are a proper professional club and have financial support from the top.

Mr. David Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that the previous two champions of the Vauxhall league have been refused admission to the football league because of bureaucracy? It was alleged that their grounds were not up to standard at Christmas but the ground at Stevenage, which won the league this year, is up to scratch. Does he not think that it is completely wrong that a club should play for a whole season and win the Vauxhall league but, because of a closed shop, a club such as Torquay, which has struggled for 20 years, is not relegated?

Mr. Greenway: I cannot justify it, but I remember that when Maidstone United won promotion it did not have its own ground and had to play at Dartford. That caused a great deal of bitterness in what was then the fourth division. That was why the rule to which my hon. Friend refers was introduced. Clubs could spend all their money on players and nothing on their ground but, when they were promoted, people had to go to watch them at a pit of a place. Poor Bristol Rovers is still playing at Bath and its plans for a new ground are still not completely developed. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is important that there is a flow of teams being relegated and promoted, including via the Vauxhall Conference. The matter that he highlights leaves a nasty taste in the mouth and must seem very unfair to Stevenage supporters.

I mentioned the development of facilities. I greatly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's comments about facilities in schools and access to national lottery money. Only the other day, he received a presentation from a company called All Four Sports. It intends to create indoor facilities at grass-roots level for the four sports of cricket, soccer, hockey and rugby. The project has the support of a number of sports associations and a number of leading sportsmen.

I have referred to the project because I believe that there can be no real criticism of the way in which the Sports Council has dealt with its responsibility as a funding body for lottery money. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that we need people to have commitment, to show initiative and to show enterprise, whether in the public sector, the voluntary sector or private businesses. They must act as the catalyst to get access to the money so that we can create a range of facilities.

My hon. Friend the Minister has set the target of good access to sports facilities for all youngsters, not just in inner cities but in rural areas, by the end of the century. That is an ambitious target, but we must achieve it. We can achieve it because we have access to funds as a result of the lottery. That is different from having a special, one-off Government grant and having to get an application in by Christmas or else the money is gone. The money is there month after month after month. It is a tremendous opportunity for us to produce and harness the talent that we need, whether to win competitions like Euro 96 or to have more champions and gold medallists in the Olympics and better rugby teams. We can do it and I greatly welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister has said today about excellence.

12 noon

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I am delighted to take part in this debate on sport; this is the first time I have contributed to a sport debate. In normal circumstances, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) speaks for the Liberal Democrats on sport. He is, of course, well qualified to do so, having been captain of the British team at the Olympic games in Tokyo. He held the Scottish 100 m record of 10.2 seconds on a cinder track for seven years and he still shows a remarkable turn of speed running up the stairs to the office we share in one of the turrets in this building. Unfortunately, he has duties elsewhere today and I have an uphill task attempting to match the quality of the speech he would have made.

I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway)—first, because of his position as chairman of the all-party racing group. I hope to see him at Cheltenham race course for the Gold cup next year. Secondly, although he claims to be president of York City, in a magnificent book called "Football and the Commons People", for which he and I both wrote chapters, he admits to being an Arsenal fanatic. We may both have attended the league cup final at Wembley in 1969, because I have to admit to being a Swindon Town supporter. The hon. Gentleman may remember that full time finished at 1-1 and that Swindon scored two goals in extra time with the flying winger Don Rogers. Fortunately for Arsenal supporters, two years later the club won the double, which may have been some compensation. That proved that the team had learnt something from Swindon on that occasion.

I shall concentrate on three points: first, the purpose of sport; secondly, the value and the economic good sense of investing in sport; and, thirdly, if time allows, what Britain could be like when sport is available to all. The Liberal Democrats' top priority is to raise the overall quality of life of all Britain's citizens, and we see sport as having a significant role in achieving that objective. It improves the health and fitness of participants.

I compliment the Health Education Authority on its current "Active for Life" campaign. I have a leaflet promoting the campaign here with me, which sums up the proposals in 10 simple points. It says:

"Just in case you still need convincing, here are 10 ways in which regular and moderate physical activity can improve your life.

1. You'll look better and feel great.

2. It will help control your weight and keep you in good shape.

3. It's a great stress-beater and an important weapon for surviving the stresses and strains of modern life.

4. It's a good way to meet new friends and develop new interests.

5. It helps control blood pressure.

6. It reduces the risk of Coronary Heart Disease . . . a major killer for men and women in this country. Active and fit people have up to half the risk of CHD.

7. It may help prevent osteoporosis in later life which can affect one in five women aged 50 and over.

8. It decreases the risk of certain cancers, eg. cancer of the colon.

9. It can help to keep you mobile and independent particularly in later years.

10. Regular, moderate physical activity keeps you strong, flexible and full of energy!"

We all need some of that.

Above all, sport is good fun, whether it is a family walk or a charity fun run. It allows individuals to set their own goals—whether they are swimming their first width or competing for Olympic gold medals. Some hon. Members have competed for Olympic gold medals, but I can remember swimming my first width. The joy on the faces of children when they achieve that is something to behold.

Britain has produced and continues to produce many outstanding world-class performers in many different sports. This year we shall see competitors competing—and, we hope, winning medals—in the Olympic games in Atlanta. As I come from Gloucestershire, I should mention our latest home-grown world record holder, the England wicket keeper Jack Russell, who took 11 catches in the second test match against South Africa earlier this year. It was the first series that England played in that country since the ending of apartheid. South Africa has made a remarkable breakthrough in the sporting world since those days.

If I may share one of my favourite sporting memories with the House, I was fortunate enough to be in Jamaica when England achieved its first test match victory for 30 years. I saw Jack Russell, the Gloucestershire wicket keeper, cut his Gloucestershire team mate, Courtney Walsh, just backward of square in front of the large scoreboard at Sabina Park. That memory will live with me for a long time. I am not alone in wondering what on earth the selectors thought they were doing when they dropped Jack Russell for a season or two, and perhaps they will hear this message while they are watching him perform heroics at today's match in Edgbaston.

As we have already heard, sport is big business. It creates wealth and jobs and is a net contributor to the public purse. It accounts for almost 500,000 jobs, generating nearly £9 billion in consumer expenditure. For every £1 that central Government spend on sport, £7 is received by the Treasury from sport-related tax and other revenue. It is a good investment for the Government. The Liberal Democrats believe that the income generated by sport alone makes it worthy of Government financial support and the provision of high-quality sports facilities for both casual use and competition should be central to any Government's health promotion programme.

It is impossible to quantify the value of sport in keeping Britain's citizens fit and healthy and reducing the amount that we spend on the health service. Sport also acts as a focal point for communities, creating a sense of identity and commitment for participants, spectators, voluntary officials and others. The regeneration of Newcastle with its football team under Kevin Keegan's management is one such example.

Sport has a vital role to play in tackling the alienation from society that is keenly felt by many young people. There is significant evidence that juvenile crime rates are lower where there are good community sports facilities.

When facilities are available, they should be open for use. There is absolutely no point in leaving them unused and unoccupied. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East recalled that, when he was first appointed to the British Sports Council by Lord Howe back in 1965, his first meeting concerned dual community use of facilities, and the great stumbling block was who would pay the janitor's wages if he had to stay after 4 pm. Some 10 or 12 years later, my hon. and learned Friend was appointed to the Scottish Sports Council and his first meeting involved a discussion of the community use of sports facilities. Once again, the stumbling block was who would pay the janitor's wages after 4 pm. That discussion is still continuing in regional sports councils, school governors' meetings and elsewhere.

How often have hon. Members seen playing fields locked up while youngsters roam the streets, sometimes kicking a ball and dodging traffic at the same time, and sometimes becoming involved in acts of vandalism and worse? I cannot understand why school sports facilities are not used more widely, especially at weekends and in school holidays. If it takes a small amount of money to pay sports coaches to teach youngsters out of school hours, we should find it.

Some initiatives are going on. I am delighted that the Cheltenham and Gloucester college of higher education and Cheltenham Town football club—the Robins—are co-ordinating a training session in the summer holidays to try to keep some of the Cheltenham youngsters concentrating on their football rather than anything else. Finding that small amount of money may not lead to many Olympic champions, but it would help young people to develop their skills and self-confidence, and channel their energy into something positive, rather than leaving them with nothing to do.

With unemployment still relatively high and free time likely to increase, sport and leisure provision will become increasingly important. Already, almost half of Britain's citizens take part in sport or physical recreation at least once a month, and many millions more are regular spectators and follow the fortunes of their local team. Sport can promote and enhance Britain's standing in the world; it can break barriers and build bridges between communities and nations. We hope to see some of that over the next three weeks in Euro 96. The very significant contribution made to sport by Britain's Afro-Caribbean community has brought many other benefits to race relations.

As has been already been said, competition has its part to play, but it is not the sole justification for playing sport. Most people play sport for fun and fitness—be it golf, swimming, sailing or walking—but, for some, competition heightens enjoyment. Sport is not only valuable to those taking part such as athletes, coaches and officials, but hugely entertaining to people of all ages. It is impossible to estimate the entertainment value of sport to many people who cannot participate for whatever reason. Sport on television, radio, in newspapers and in magazines brings immense pleasure.

In *The House Magazine* on 27 May, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East placed responsibility on the press and the public to be more positive. He said:

"The press and the public must be more positive. It does nothing for a team's or an individual player's confidence if they are denounced as failures."

How many times have we read in some newspapers immediate calls for a change of manager and a British team being labelled turnips or useless on returning from some narrow defeat?

[Mr. Nigel Jones]

I commend local newspapers that cover sport in their areas, such as the *Gloucestershire Echo*, which faithfully reports local sport day after day and week after week. Its sports pages, especially the sometimes wacky Derek Goddard column, are well read in our household. The media have an enormous part to play. I well remember my dear father, who was not a well man at the time and subsequently died, enjoying from his armchair the exploits of I. T. Botham in the test series against Australia in 1981.

The idea of an academy of sport has already been mentioned in this debate. It seems entirely sensible. The experience in Australia suggests that such an academy could produce world stars. I want any such organisation to take account of existing centres of excellence such as Lilleshall, Plas-y-Brenin in Wales, Glenmore lodge and the outdoor sports centre in Inverclyde. A regional organisation is a good option—perhaps with a central administration function. While I am on the subject, would it be possible to rename the Department of National Heritage the Department of National Heritage, Arts and Sport to give sport that additional boost?

Mr. John Greenway: And tourism.

Mr. Jones: And tourism.

Sports clubs are also enormously important. In my area, they include the Young Men's Christian Association, the Old Patesians and a club that organises horse riding for disabled people. There is nothing more wonderful than seeing the look of delight in the eyes of a young person at the end of a horse ride. Such activities must be supported.

The Minister might like to consider that the Central Council of Physical Recreation is mounting a campaign to enable voluntary sports clubs to become eligible for automatic rate relief in return for youth sport development. That is a very worthwhile aim. It has done a survey and estimates that the current costs of relief to central Government would be £14 million.

I listened carefully to the Minister's speech, and he mentioned a figure of £1 million for additional spending on coaching. I wonder whether he would go to see his colleagues in the Treasury, who are always telling us that the economy is in good shape, and find out whether he can do something about rate relief to help non-profit-distributing sports clubs.

We must remove the barriers to sport. I worked for some years in Sweden, and the Swedes have a positive approach to sport. Most small communities have invested in their own facilities, and the costs to families of using them are much lower than in Britain. Sport is an investment. There is a cost, an outlay, in providing facilities and coaches to run the sports centres, but there is a payback in reduced health care costs and less crime.

I have something to say about the funding of élite sports people—the people who will be the champions, the gold medal winners, of the future. I have permission to mention a young man from my constituency—18-year-old Leon Taylor. Leon attends Cheltenham sixth form centre, of which I am a governor, and in February he won the title of British men's high board diving champion. He trains almost every day after school, and is a bright, likeable, sensible young man.

Leon takes part in competitions all over Britain and Europe. His great ambition is to take part in the Olympic games, but although he is British champion, because of his age and his limited competition experience he was told earlier this year that in order even to be considered for Olympic selection he needed to take part in competitions in America, Canada and Mexico. There was little or no funding available.

I had a long discussion with Leon's family, who have had no holiday for seven years because of the support that they give Leon with his diving. The cost of sending Leon and his coach, Ian Barr, to north America for those competitions was to be more than £2,000. If Leon had not had the good fortune of having parents who care—they are not a rich family, but they put all their spare cash into his training—friends who cough up a bit, and one or two local bodies, such as the local trusts that have generously contributed towards his costs, and the local Round Table, which is also considering giving him a grant, he would not have been able to compete in those events. Without having done so, he would not have been eligible for selection for the Olympic games in Atlanta.

I wonder how many talented young people miss the opportunity of representing their county or their country in important competitions because of lack of money; yet in terms of overall Government expenditure, the expenses of those potential stars while they are climbing the ladder are a flea-bite.

The world-famous ice skaters, Torvill and Dean, were financially assisted by their local council when they were up-and-coming competitors, and without that support they would not have achieved what they did. In these days of capped local authorities, they probably would not have been so fortunate. The Torvills and Deans of tomorrow may never achieve their dreams, and may not give the enormous pleasure to their audiences which could span the globe.

As a nation, we must encourage people to take up sport, but we should also be prepared to back them financially if they show the promise which could lead to national and international prominence.

Hon. Members will know that contacts built up through sport can last a lifetime. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East told me during a recent famous trial that he once beat O. J. Simpson in a sprint—not in a court of law but on the track. He still regards O. J. as a friend, although they rarely meet these days.

Facilities for spectators are improving all the time. The information super-highway will increase opportunities for people to follow their team apart from just going to the match. No matter where one is in the world, one can follow the progress of one's team by subscribing to the appropriate channel. I suspect that most, if not all, football league and county cricket matches will be televised in the near future. Sports grounds ought to become family entertainment centres, and some clubs are beginning to work towards that. While the football fan watches the match, other members of his family can be taking part in their own sporting interest. Parents must take part in sport, and even hon. Members play from time to time. I have been selected to play cricket in my constituency on 21 June in a match between two teams of local residents. No doubt one or two of them will give me the benefit of their point of view on the issues of the day.

Euro 96 will dominate Britain's sports pages for the next three weeks, although Wimbledon starts soon and I hope that that also receives coverage. I hope that the idiots who sometimes disrupt our football stay away, as we do not want them. They are of no use to anyone and they should find something else to do—preferably digging their gardens. I hope that Euro 96 is full of fun and enjoyment. It is an opportunity to forget for a moment the problems with beef, the arguments about a single currency and our problems with our European partners. We should just sit back and enjoy—particularly the final between England and Scotland.

Terry Venables and his squad have my best wishes, but I would like to refer to his successor, Glenn Hoddle. As a Swindon Town supporter, I have experience of Glenn Hoddle's management skills in partnership with his assistant John Gorman. They performed miracles at Swindon, taking a demoralised team from the lower reaches of division 1 into the premiership. Sadly, Glenn Hoddle then left, and we found ourselves quickly back in division 2. This season, however, we have gained promotion back to division 1 under the new, and rather tougher, leadership of Steve McMahon. Glenn Hoddle and John Gorman will need time to bring the wonders that they showed at Swindon to the national team, but they have the right approach. They are both young enough and, given sufficient time, I can see them possibly producing a team capable of winning the World cup in the future.

Sport is fun and produces enormous camaraderie, but it is also important. When asked whether he thought football was a matter of life and death, the late great Bill Shankly is reported to have said, "No, it is far more important than that."

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Before I call the next speaker, I should point out that there are two hours remaining in the debate for Back Benchers. Eight Back-Bench Members are hoping to catch my eye and, with some co-operation, they all should be successful.

12.22 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): Hon. Members will be aware that long-standing engagements in the House may make it impossible for me to be here for the winding-up speeches, for which I apologise to the House.

One of the great advantages of representing Wimbledon is that wherever one goes in the world, people have heard of it and there is an instant basis for conversation. One of the disadvantages—particularly at this time of year—is that colleagues from all parties in the House approach me in the belief that my pockets are bulging with tickets for the centre court. I regret to disillusion them, but that is not the case.

I have no doubt that some future Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards will embarrass me—and not, incidentally, my host—by asking the value of two tickets to the royal box, plus lunch for me and my wife. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) is not here at the moment. He and I have both been in the royal box and I hope that, for many years, he will continue to accompany me there as the Opposition spokesman. If we have problems with the commissioner, I hope that he and I will put our heads together and decide whether we must declare that interest.

Other than the All England club, Wimbledon featured in national sport when Wimbledon football club climbed up the divisions, and against all expectations, won the FA cup. I hesitate to remind my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) of that, because Luton did its utmost to prevent Wimbledon's progress—knowing the man he is, he took it gallantly. I am sure that he took some pleasure in seeing Wimbledon ultimately beat Liverpool.

Wimbledon football club is, sadly, currently playing outside the borough, which is absolutely ridiculous, and quite as ridiculous as Crystal Palace playing at Wimbledon. I hope that the current exploratory talks will yet produce a satisfactory outcome for the club's return to the borough, given the enlightened attitude of the management of the club, Merton council and, possibly, the owners of Wimbledon stadium. The proposal is in the melting pot at the moment, but I shall need to be reassured that my residents will not be put to great inconvenience if such a move comes about.

Wimbledon is extremely fortunate in having a relatively large area of open spaces for a London borough. It is one of my major public aims to keep it that way in the face of the predatory desires of property developers. Time after time, threats have been fought off. The extension of the designation of metropolitan open land has been helpful.

At the moment, the future disposal of land surrounding Atkinson Morley hospital, which is used for recreational and sporting purposes, is causing much concern. I shall be working with the Wimbledon Society and local residents to oppose any development beyond the current building limits. I am well aware that health authorities have an obligation to get the maximum price for the site, but I believe that it is a sensitive matter. In this day and age, we must achieve a proper balance between obtaining that maximum price and retaining sporting and recreational facilities for our constituents.

In that connection, I commend the London Playing Fields Society, which is an admirable body, although short of funds, and runs important sites used by my constituents. It owns the Prince George's playing fields, which cover 46 acres. The society has a long lease on Morden park sports centre, which covers 53 acres. The objective of the society, which was founded more than 100 years ago, and has Field Marshal Lord Bramall as its president, is to enable all members of the community to have the opportunity to play games and to fulfil their sporting potential with enjoyment. I am glad to tell the House that many tens of thousands of my constituents and others have been able to do just that because of the society's amenities.

One would think that Merton council, which I remind the House is Labour controlled, would have been broad-minded enough to give discretionary relief on rates on the Prince George's fields. It should have followed the example set by Waltham Forest and Hounslow, which also own or manage land run by the society. I am sorry to report that Merton council has been singularly unenlightened in that respect, as it has been in processing the planning application for Morden park, which would provide a new clubhouse pavilion, floodlit all-weather pitches and new playing surfaces throughout the centre. One would have thought that the local council, which is the landlord and the planning authority, could have given such an application a fair wind, but, once again, I fear that Merton council is playing to the gallery. It says that it

[Dr. Charles Goodson–Wickes]

supports sport, but when it comes to the crunch, it does nothing about it. After all, there cannot be many leaseholders in Merton willing to inject £2 million capital into improvements to council property.

The better news is that the Peter May memorial appeal, of which I am proud to be a vice-patron, is to be launched this summer. It would be premature to say much about it now, but it involves the expenditure of £7.5 million, which will help the Morden park application to which I referred. It will also provide funds to upgrade the changing facilities and pitches at the Prince George's playing fields.

The appeal has the backing of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, whose endorsement of and commitment to sport for all is well known. I hope that there will be a successful outcome of the appeal in memory of such a famous, distinguished cricketer.

Merton's open spaces are of great assistance in allowing the local education authority to achieve reasonable compliance with physical education requirements in schools. I have a national concern, however, which I want to bring before the House. I gather from the director of Army recruiting that the standard of fitness of young men attending recruit selection committees is appalling, and deteriorating.

The House might think it rather odd that I am invoking an Army issue in the debate. I do so in the context that nowadays very few people entering a workplace go through a pre-employment medical. That being so, there is not a substantial cohort of people to set against the Army's experience. Those who apply to join the armed services are probably the best scientific evidence that we have of the fitness of young people.

Earlier this week, I had a meeting at the Adjutant-General's headquarters. I learnt that during the current year 1995–96, of 20,750 applicants to join the Army, only 12,000 were accepted. That is a pass rate of 58 per cent.

The figures can be approached in more than one way. From the Army's point of view, they represent a success because they are a tribute to its efficiency in weeding out those who would not be able to fulfil a future role. Therefore, the Army is doing a good job. On the other side of the coin, the figures tell us that 42 per cent. of applicants are failing. Of that 42 per cent., 25 per cent. are medically unfit. I shall put that percentage to one side, because there are many factors to be taken into account in areas other than those that we are discussing today.

Of the 42 per cent. of applicants who do not meet the Army's requirements, 17 per cent. are physically unfit. We are talking about well-motivated, self-selecting young men who want to join the Army. We are not talking about the days of national service, when young men would do anything to come up with a trivial complaint that would rule them out as being physically unfit. The fact that 17 per cent. of applicants fail through physical unfitness, having been subjected to a basic fitness test, is a most dreadful indictment.

The percentage is misleading because a young man can attend a recruitment centre and be found to be unable to fulfil basic requirements, and then be sent off with the advice, "Go and get yourself fit. Put yourself on a diet and do some weight training or whatever. Come back in a month's time." In other words, 17 per cent. is an artificially low figure.

As a physician who has spent many years advising people on their life style in relation to their occupation, which includes, obviously, maintaining a sensible level of physical fitness, I was horrified by the figures to which I have referred. They provide the best possible index of the standard that we are turning out of our schools.

I am delighted to learn that the Army is engaging the services of an occupational physician, to test the anecdotal impression that the fitness of young people has deteriorated over the past 10 and even five years. The main causes of Army failures are muscular skeletal in origin. Surely that must have a relationship, and probably a causal one, with inadequate sport in schools.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to liaise with his counterpart in the Ministry of Defence to monitor the results of the investigation that the Army has now started, I believe, to analyse an alarming state of affairs. There seems to be no doubt, however, according to the Adjutant-General's staff, that no less than 75 per cent. of schools fail to meet the desired two hours of physical education per week standard. If they are correct, that is most alarming in itself and in relation to the existing health and well-being of young people, which is extended into their later life because, basically, if they have a healthy life style when young, they are more likely to be free of life-threatening illnesses later.

I welcome the initiatives announced today by my hon. Friend the Minister to promote sport in schools. The House and the nation neglect that subject at their peril. I congratulate him on all that he is doing to raise awareness in that sector.

12.34 pm

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I was extremely happy earlier, sitting between two supporters of Sheffield Wednesday, which my team Middlesbrough beat twice last season, both games being shown live on television. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) was too much of a gentleman to say who his team beat, but he did mention that Chelsea scored five goals only once last season. I can hear my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) laughing, as I tried to avoid him at half-time, but was unable to do so. I feel happy that those two Sheffield Wednesday supporters have left, as I do not feel so guilty now.

In relation to sport for all, one of my themes, it is worth mentioning the Oval on Wednesday—not Surrey, but the Lords versus Commons match, where a full range of talent was on display, from none to at least halfway up. Ages certainly ranged from the highest to almost youth. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) contributed not just near youth, but a woman playing the great game of cricket.

That was a great day. I do not know whether it was a bad omen for old Labour, but Lord Desai and Lord Donoughue came in with 10 overs to go and 50 runs to get and took the usual delaying tactics of the place. They scored no runs in the last 10 overs, but lasted until the end, so it was ancient Labour striking back against the Commons.

I support my party's charter for football in principle because it does not take the attitude that so many articles that I have read and so many television pundits take. They

start off by saying, "How are we going to make England, Scotland or the United Kingdom world champions?" Our charter starts at the other end. The aim is not to make British world champions, but to involve all youngsters in sport.

I am not opposed to the British academy of sport—in fact, I support it—but we are not going to get world champions by sending half a dozen people at a young age to Bisham Abbey or somewhere else and by cutting them off from society, especially if they make up only 5 per cent. of people who participate in sport. We shall win gold medals and make our nations world champions only if we ensure that all children and young people have a chance to participate in sport.

This has nothing to do with the wonderful athletes whom the Gateshead club turns out, but I remember Brendan Foster saying, when he was at his peak, that he was not the best middle-distance runner in Gateshead. His point was that few youngsters had the opportunity to become involved in athletics, so although Brendan was the world record holder at that time, had everyone in Gateshead had his opportunity, he might have been in second place. We must remember that.

Sport is like music and drama. We need to give young people encouragement and education. Sometimes, inspiration can come from a good teacher and coach or, many times, from the example of a sporting hero. To reach the levels that we want children and young people to reach, we need the facilities, equipment, sport halls and playing fields. Youngsters need the choice and, to have a firm foundation, they need a community around them. We must consider that we have lost the community that was built around single industries in towns. We must consider where such communities can come from, around which we can build the environment that youngsters need.

I spent my childhood in a small town named Grangetown, between Middlesbrough and Redcar, where all the children did was play sport. In the summer, we played tennis from early morning until we could no longer run about, then we played bowls. In the winter, we played football all the time. We built our lives around sport and had no energy left for anything else. Grangetown was shown on BBC breakfast news one morning in early 1993. The film almost brought me to tears. I even recognised the street where I lived, but where the youngsters were now setting fire to cars and houses. I wonder whether the lack of opportunity for children to play sport is a crucial cause of the breakdown of community spirit.

Perhaps we should look to the premier league clubs for opportunities for young people. Other hon. Members have complained that the fantastic amount of money that those clubs will receive in future will not be passed down. The Bosman ruling is stopping transfer fees going from large clubs down through the leagues. Perhaps we can build around the premier league and other clubs. We must avoid the drawbridge being pulled up by the premiership, especially when club directors see the money that is available.

There is a growing trend for premier league clubs to become public limited companies, when the duties of the directors change from the community to the shareholders. We are in danger of a tremendous amount of money being lost to the game. At present that money is going not to the directors but to players, in wages and signing fees. We must worry about that money going straight out of the clubs to investors, which has not happened before.

We all agree on the damage done through lack of investment in research and development and in manufacturing industry, and we cannot afford to let the same happen to sport. I was astonished to hear on television this morning the amount of money that the premier league is to receive. I am delighted, but we must try to keep that money within the game. I hope that the massive income from television deals will enable clubs to attract more world-class players from all over the globe. I hope that that wealth will not stay in Europe. The public pay excessively high entrance fees and buy expensive team shirts from premier league clubs.

I trust that some of that wealth will go not only to top players but to the countries from which they come in growing numbers, such as Brazil and Africa. I hope that some of the money will go to children in countries around the world, so that they will have the facilities to participate in sport, which will give them something to live for. I hope that the children will not merely be television spectators through the railings of the stately homes of the Bundesliega and premier league in Britain.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West will be pleased to hear me say that we must look at the alternatives to building on green-field sites. When a wonderful new stadium is built on such a site, it gets headlines, but that is not necessarily good news. The last act of Cleveland county council was to criticise the inadequate car parking facilities at the new Riverside stadium in Middlesbrough. What it forgot was that it was closer to the town centre than Ayresome park. People could park their cars in the multi-storey car park and walk to the game. We want to be sure that people can come into the town from outlying places, using public transport.

We should not build any more grounds on green-field sites. Thank goodness there are not that many areas with derelict industrial land, but where there is, we should consider those areas carefully. If we do build new grounds on out-of-town sites, it should be where there are already multi-screen cinemas and superstores. If facilities are concentrated in one area, we might be able to persuade public transport to service them.

We must listen to the supporters of the game of football. Indeed, there are signs of that happening on both sides of the House. Perhaps we should pay attention to the fanzines. We read them for their humour. They often attack football directors, but they do so with great humour. They have an insight into the psychology of football fans. It would be a good idea to get hold of a selection of fanzines and read them not just for their humour, but for the other information that we can get from them.

While driving here this morning, I was disturbed by the number of people ringing in to the radio programme to complain bitterly about the state of the stations around Wembley. They felt very guilty and ashamed that visitors from abroad would have to travel through those stations. More preparation should have been done and the place spruced up a little. Some hon. Members have referred to the entertainments planned for some of the cities, but perhaps we should have been better prepared in other areas.

I support what the Minister said about a school's prospectus having to state its sporting aims. It is one way to get into people's minds a subject that has mostly been forgotten.

[Mr. Alan Keen]

Although I have had a little dig at the academy of sport, I actually support it. Close to the most deprived area in Feltham is a stadium that, at first glance, looks excellent. However, in reality the running track is unusable and Hounslow athletic club—one of the top clubs in the country—can no longer train there. The all-weather football pitch needs repair. I am not saying that we must put those facilities before the academy of sport, but we need to find some balance to ensure that there are facilities for all, rather than just taking the most promising people and giving them specialist training and coaching.

I was pleased to hear the Minister pay tribute to local authorities. Some people criticise them, others praise them. My local authority in Hounslow has been under tremendous pressure in recent years and has had to make cuts of £6 million each year as the revenue support grant has, in effect, been cut back. It has resisted the temptation to chop leisure services, which might have been the easiest course to take. It has had to pare away at social services and other areas. It understands that investing in sport is investing for the medium and the long term. It is vital to keep the services intact. The council deserves praise and support for that, rather than criticism. It would have been so easy to say, "Right, we shall sell off the leisure centres." If it had done that, all the children in that area who cannot afford private clubs would not even have been able to go to the swimming baths.

I conclude by saying—with humour—that I was excited at one point in the Minister's speech, when he spoke at length about jumping on and off benches in PE. At first, I thought that he was talking about a new sport that he will propose for the next Olympics. I have been told many times that fishing is the most popular participatory sport, but I think that bench jumping might just beat it. Some of those who are not too far from where I stand seem to be quite expert at it—they have certainly been jumping on and off the Treasury Bench.

12.59 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this very important debate on sport. I believe that the mood of the country is reflected in our achievements on the sports field. Examples include the nation's pride when we won the world cup in 1966, which was a long time ago; in 1936, when Fred Perry—the last Brit to do so—won the Wimbledon tennis championship; and in 1976, when Virginia Wade won the ladies' title.

It seems a million years ago since our cricket team won a series against the West Indies or the Australians. Yes, we have won world titles—with Nigel Mansell and Linford Christie—and I think that we all wanted to believe that Frank Bruno was world boxing champion, although one wonders what sort of authority is running the professional boxing business. The public were asked to watch a series of fights pitting Bruno against joke boxers, only to allow him to embarrass himself in a real fight with Mike Tyson. Who was to blame? Bruno is not to blame; I suggest that it was greed.

The best golfer in the world is English, and I am proud to say that he is from my constituency. Who could ever forget our retaining the Ryder cup last year, or his winning his third green jacket as he overhauled Greg Norman in the Masters a few weeks ago? Why is he the best? Not because he is the most gifted player, but because of his dedication, discipline and determination to win. Practice makes perfect, and he will not accept second best in any preparations before a tournament, or during it. He is an example of excellence, and we in Welwyn Hatfield are proud of him.

The Government have shown a great interest in sport in terms of providing money and new ideas. Sport in schools is paramount to our future, but sport and its progress is not entirely down to the Government or to schools. Other authorities have the real responsibility. I suppose that that brings me to ask what has gone wrong with three of our most popular sports: cricket, tennis and football. It is impossible to cover all the shortcomings in other sports in a short debate but, sooner or later, the problems will have to be faced.

There was a time when we produced great cricketers as if they were coming off an assembly line: Grace, Barnes, Larwood, Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Verity, Hammond, Hutton, Compton, Edrich, May, Trueman, Laker, Bedser, Tyson, Cowdrey, Botham and Gower. So what happened? Where are the great players today? There is none. Why? There are many reasons, but the first concerns the competition, which has not moved with the times. There should be three divisions, promotion and relegation.

It seems unreal that, in the past 70 years, only two counties—Glamorgan and Durham—have joined the current league championship. The authority—the Test and County Cricket Board, although it was the Marylebone Cricket Club until fairly recently—has a vested interest in keeping the competition in-house, because the bulk of county revenue comes from test matches and sponsorship. The so-called first-class counties keep 90 per cent. of their revenue for themselves, and only 10 per cent. goes to the minor counties and minor leagues. It is little wonder that there is little or no desire to encourage more counties into the first-class game. Indeed, the reverse is the case.

About 30 years ago, it was decided that too many county games were drawn, so the authority decided to prepare wickets to produce a result in three days, which was the maximum duration of a match. The result was a wicket on which a fast bowler did not have to bowl fast. The idea was that he should wait for the third day, bowl medium pace on a length and let the wicket do the rest. It was not necessary to learn how to swing a ball or get movement off the wicket. A badly produced wicket did it all for the bowler. The batsmen could not hit through the ball, the ball would not come on to the bat or through at a regular height, and shot-making became impossible. At the same time, other countries were learning on perfect, hard surfaces. Their batsmen and bowlers had to learn their trade—and they did.

The crowds disappeared from county grounds. People go to cricket to watch batsmen hitting the ball all over the ground—which they cannot do on bad wickets. A few years ago, the penny dropped, and there is now a desperate bid to produce good surfaces, but it is too late for an immediate improvement. It will take 20 years for us to rediscover our form on decent wickets.

Another unfortunate development involving our test team in the past few years is the lack of discipline. Players playing for their country are not prepared to play with clean pads or clean boots. They wear watches and sunglasses on the field of play, not to tell the time or keep

out of the sun, but to line their pockets with money from sponsors. Captains have press meetings in flip-flops; they appear unshaven and without a jacket.

The fiasco surrounding successive management regimes of the test team continues unabated. There should be a chairman of selection and six selectors to pick the team, and the captain should have full authority. A cricket team does not need a manager in a home series; touring sides should have a tour manager and an assistant to look after the administration and well-being of the team. Members of the administration are all ex-players or the gin-and-tonic brigade. They are all out of touch and flapping around not knowing how to arrest the decline in our cricket. I hope that my comments will give them something to think about.

What about tennis, where we are probably in the most ludicrous situation of all? We do not have one lady player in the top 100 in the world and we have only one man—Tim Henman—in the top 100 men. I do not include the Canadian player we bought to play for us because we have been relegated to a Davis cup-status of a non-event. The last time a British male player won Wimbledon was 60 years ago and, in the women's game, our last winner was 20 years ago. Why?

It all starts at club level. Only recently, a well-known club in Hertfordshire interviewed the parents before allowing a young player to join the club. Another club will not play any under-18-year-olds in the ladies' team, and yet another will not let an under-16 play at weekends. That is not uncommon.

Clubs and county associations are affiliated to the Lawn Tennis Association. The LTA has the game in its grip, and the game cannot escape. The LTA gets its money from the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in a nice cosy arrangement that has lasted for 100 years. "You play your tournament at our club," says the All England club "and, after expenses, we'll give you what is left over." That arrangement means that, however much money the All England club makes in the Wimbledon fortnight—approximately £20 million after expenses—it all goes to the sole benefactor, the LTA.

The LTA has been totally disastrous at producing facilities and opportunities for our budding youngsters, which is proved by our appalling record in the Davis cup and our complete lack of champions in the men's and ladies' game. How do we change that?

First, the All England club has to let private or public companies bid through presentations for its money on, say, a three-year contract to develop alternatives. Young players would then accept that, although a club was not signed up to the LTA, it would be possible for them to compete not only in all local competitions, but for their county and their country. At the moment, without LTA affiliation, that is not possible.

The LTA runs all competitions. Why? When a private organisation wins a contract from the All England club, the LTA must not be able to undermine it by being given all the best tickets, the royal box and the marquees during the Wimbledon fortnight. Sponsors must not be wooed away by the LTA, which has the perks at its disposal to do so, in liaison with the All England club.

The LTA should have to compete. It could not, because it is run and dominated by losers—people who have never won anything on or off the field, not just recently, but in living memory. The LTA terrifies parents and intimidates players, both young and not so young, with its dreadful sub-standard coaches who, in many instances, have never competed at the top. The LTA is a curse on the game and will continue to be so unless the All England club is brave enough to say, "Enough is enough."

With Euro 96 approaching, football is in turmoil, even though attendances continue to increase, which is probably the only good thing we can say. Yes, we did win the World cup in 1966, but we have won nothing since. Yes, millions of pounds are being poured into the game from television, but that money is being spent irresponsibly on transfer fees and players' salaries while very little is spent on improving stadiums.

I hope that the premier league clubs will look at the rest of the league when they get the £8 million. I doubt that they will. Stevenage, which is not in my constituency, won the Vauxhall Conference league, but it is being barred from the football league because the Football Association, with its closed-shop attitude, is protecting Torquay United in a bid to keep the league a closed shop. That is scandalous.

Developments, especially those at the bigger clubs, are financed mainly by the Football Trust. In the rat race to win, the league is fragmented, as we all know. That is true even of the premier league, where only six clubs have a realistic chance of winning the title or of winning one of the other domestic trophies. Such is the skill factor of our game that there is no chance of our winning any competition in Europe.

Hooliganism is still rife. In the season just gone, a match at Brighton was abandoned. The season was littered with incidents. Cantona, the footballer of the year, leapt into the crowd and kung fu-kicked a spectator, yet he is on £30,000 a year—

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): A week.

Mr. Evans: He is on £30,000 a week, and he is a Frenchman at that. He should have been banned from our game, but he was not. He was forgiven, and we then wonder why fans break goalposts at Brighton.

The FA is a bunch of amateurs running a professional game. The chief executive, who has presided over the demise of discipline required on and off the field, has clearly been incompetent for a long time. I could spend the rest of the day giving examples of hooliganism over the past 10 years. The most vivid example, which says it all, involves the behaviour of the FA, particularly its chief executive and chairman, the manager of the English football team and, indeed, the players. I refer to the inexplicable decision to go to China and back as preparation for the most important tournament in this country for 30 years.

Football is a violent game. It is more accurately described as a collision than as a contact sport. Nobody expects the gladiators who play at the highest level to be statesmen or saints, or even the mythical Corinthians of the legendary old school for whom playing up and playing the game was more important than winning. That is not what they are paid millions for, but the latest bad behaviour by the supposedly grown men of the England squad confirms the depressing image of English football after its age of innocence. That impression is not so much one of lions led by donkeys as of hippopotami managed by hypocrites.

[Mr. Evans]

The extravagantly boozy, shirt-stripping 29th birthday party for Paul Gascoigne in a Hong Kong nightclub was worse than outrageous. It was idiotic, because it was in public, so it was photographed and sold to the newspapers, thus signalling a humiliating message to the millions for whom Gazza and his team mates are heroes. It does not inspire confidence in England's discipline or fitness on the field a fortnight later in the most important football championship to be held in Britain for 30 years.

The drunken damage caused to the aircraft bringing the team home was criminal and dangerous, as well as appalling publicity for the England game, but the timorous reaction by England's football authorities was far worse. This week's statements were made too reluctantly, too late and were too secretive in their bad-boy network.

The refusal by Terry Venables to name the four players chiefly responsible for damaging the aeroplane was an example not of collective team responsibility but of managerial cowardice. Who can doubt that the affair would have been trodden into the mud had Cathay Pacific not claimed £5,000 in compensation for the damage to its 747? If the offenders had been yobbish fans rather than yobbish megastars, they would have been taken to police cells at Heathrow without their studs touching the turf, but as the ball bounced, Terry Venables acted late—and with apparent reluctance—by ruling out in advance the expulsion of anyone from the squad.

A publicity agent's description of the team's behaviour as "mild high jinks" was an insult to youthful high spirits as well as a monstrous euphemism in a sport where euphemism is usually offside. Any player who misbehaved so wildly when Sir Alf Ramsey was manager would have been sent straight home. In those days, nobody would have dared or wanted to misbehave when wearing a England blazer.

Gazza and the rest should not have had a chance of starting on Saturday to redeem their professional reputations in the historic national arenas if the squad was collectively responsible for its behaviour in Hong Kong and on the Cathay Pacific aeroplane. The manager should have resigned and the squad should have been dismissed. Unless the authority was prepared to allow another squad to be named, we should have withdrawn from the tournament. There is no chance of winning such a tournament. At that level it is simply impossible without discipline.

If the squad had been dismissed as I have just suggested, those who wore the England shirt in future would be aware of their responsibilities and they would wear it with pride. Let us hope that, when Glenn Hoddle takes over as manager, new standards will be set and that, thereafter, English players will behave in a way that is conducive to pride and integrity, that he himself will dress and behave in a manner that befits the manager of our national team—with the top button of his shirt done up so as not to give the impression of a Sunday morning, jack-the-lad manager—and perhaps the young men who make up the England team will rediscover the important old English virtues of discipline, modesty and common sense.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, a nation's mood is set by its sporting heroes and achievements. Let us hope that this summer will be a triumph in sporting success in cricket, tennis and football—but I doubt it.

1.9 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). If I were a member of the England squad, I might argue that Members of Parliament were no people to lecture footballers on drunkenness, yobbishness and bad behaviour.

The eve of Euro 96 is an appropriate time for this debate. I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in what has until now been something of a "Boy's Own" debate to raise issues of wider significance. It is impossible to exaggerate sport's significance in inner-city areas such as Hackney. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) said how important sport was to him as a schoolboy in a very poor town in the north.

As we approach the millennium, sportsmen are the only authentic heroes for young people in inner cities such as those whom I represent in Hackney. The days when people saw politicians, soldiers, explorers and even business men as heroes are long gone. Sportsmen are the heroes for the young boys and girls in my constituency's schools and it is one of the reasons why sport is so important and of a wider significance to society.

For young people in inner-city areas such as Hackney, especially young males who seem to be systematically underachieving educationally, sport offers an arena where achievement and the ability to excel seem possible. Sadly, despite the bravado, bluster and even violence, such young men—black and white—often have deep feelings of inferiority in education and even their ability to hold a job. Sport for them is an arena in which they can imagine themselves achieving. That is such a positive factor to build on in education and society. Sport helps people in inner cities to build a sense of community and offers wider horizons, which, in terms of turning them into citizens and helping to build a society, is very significant.

A few days ago my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was talking about his ideas on curfews for young children. While I agree that it is sad and inappropriate for young children under the age of 10 to be on the streets until all hours, I do not believe that curfews are the answer. A proper policy on sport in schools to provide sporting facilities for young people is the positive and constructive way in which to ensure that children under the age of 10 are occupied and not hanging around on the streets where, as we know, the devil finds work for idle hands.

I particularly wish to mark the contribution of black and—to use the word much favoured by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield—immigrant sports people. Whenever race and immigration issues are raised in the House, they tend to be in a negative context such as immigration controls, refugees and crime. I want to speak about the excellence, dedication and hard work that so many black people and people of immigrant descent display in the sporting arena which makes them heroes for black and white young people.

We will all have marvelled in the past few weeks at the truly stupendous performance of Linford Christie on the athletics field. At a point in his career when many people might be thinking of leaving athletics, Linford Christie is

still a world beater. For most young people, certainly in my part of London, he is much more of a hero than any hon. Member.

Mr. David Evans: Is the hon. Lady aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) is the president of the Haringey athletics club?

Ms Abbott: I am well aware not only of the hon. Gentleman's contribution to sport but of his very strong personal stand on racial discrimination. None the less, since we have had so many negative debates in recent months about immigration, refugees and race, I thought that it was important to take the opportunity to mark the achievements of British citizens such as Linford Christie who are excelling and doing this country proud.

I want to say a little about racism in sport, and I shall start with football.

I was interested to read a recent newspaper article by Cyrille Regis, one of the first black players to play for England in the early 1980s, in which he said how much hate mail he received when he first put on the England strip. He remembers getting a letter with a bullet in, saying that the minute he went on to the pitch at Wembley, the bullet would find him.

Cyrille Regis continued:

"But, sadly, racism is still there and I don't know if it can ever be eradicated . . . We've got plenty of black players now but hardly any black fans and that's terrible. In black people's minds they're still frightened to go to matches because they know that there will be people there who are racists and they might get beaten up".

It is remarkable that although about one quarter of our professional footballers are black, a tiny proportion of regular attenders at football matches are black. I am afraid that that shows the continuing prevalence of racism among sporting crowds.

Another sad fact, despite the number of black footballers who excel on the field, is the very small number of black people who get into football management. I can think of Viv Anderson, who was brought in by Bryan Robson as an assistant at Middlesbrough, and more recently, Luther Blissett has been made Watford's first team coach.

If black footballers are good enough to go out there and play and work their hearts out, if they have the talent and ability to play on the field, I wonder why they are not coming through into management.

Mr. Tony Banks: There is another exception to add to my hon. Friend's excellent and thoughtful speech. That is, of course, Ruud Gullit, who has just been appointed manager and coach of Chelsea. But he is Dutch.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Ashton: May I also point out to my hon. Friend the fact that Brendon Batson is the deputy at the Professional Footballers Association?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friends, whose knowledge of football far exceeds mine, but I hope that they will accept that the general point stands: we have many black footballers on the field, but they are not coming through into management.

I also want to say a word on behalf of Britain's Asian communities. There are at least 1.8 million Asians in this country, 60 per cent. of Bengalis play soccer, compared with 47 per cent. of whites, and there are 300 Asian teams in Britain, with a nationwide network of Asian leagues. Yet to the best of my knowledge there is not one Asian professional footballer.

I know from my own constituency, where the North London Muslim Association has a very successful soccer team, how enthusiastic young Asians are about soccer, so I hope that it will not be too long before we start seeing Asian footballers taking their place on the pitch with those of other races and colours.

If we are talking about sport for all, and the importance of excelling, that can be genuine only if we pick our sportsmen from society as a whole, and if no group in society is excluded, for reasons beyond its control, from being able to show what it can do in representing its town and its country on the sports field.

Before I leave soccer I shall remark on a matter that has already been raised—the loophole in the Football (Offences) Act 1991, whereby if a whole group of people chant racist abuse, they can be prosecuted, but if a single person is calling out racist abuse, that person cannot be prosecuted. I hope that it will not be too long before the Act is tightened.

I do not know how black professional footballers tolerate week in and week out the hideous abuse, the bananas and the catcalls that many have to face when they go on to the pitch. I believe that there is less of that now than there was years ago, because there are so many more black professionals playing for different clubs. But it is still a sad thing, especially in a sport where so many young people go as spectators. It cannot be the right example for young children to go to football matches and hear their elders and "betters" chanting abuse at black footballers. I hope that the 1991 Act will be tightened to prevent that.

This is not an issue for Britain alone. Hon. Members will have read about the experiences of Paul Ince in Italy, playing for Milan, and the vicious and fascist abuse, banners and catcalls. It is one thing to make heroes of individual black sportsmen, but if we take their achievements seriously, those of us who are interested in sport, and those of us who serve in a voluntary or political capacity, must ensure that sport is a safe and constructive environment for people at every level, whether they are sportsmen or spectators, both in this country and internationally.

When people talk about black sportsmen, whether they are footballers or athletes, there is sometimes a temptation to say, or even to hint, "Well, of course, they are good because there is some innate physiological difference."

Sir Roger Bannister was quoted recently on the subject of black athletes. He said:

"It is obvious that there must be something special about their anatomy or physiology which produces these outstanding successes".

I am sure that Sir Roger Bannister did not mean any harm by that, but black sportsmen resent the notion that there is some anatomical difference. At the turn of the century, many of the top boxers in this country were of Jewish origin, and we had a world champion in Kid Berg. There was no physiological reason why young Jews in between the wars excelled in boxing—it was because they wanted

[Ms Abbott]

to succeed and because they worked hard to be better. Black sportsmen want some respect for their capacity to work and to achieve success, and they do not want their achievements written off as some kind of physiological or anatomical quirk.

We have read in the newspapers recently about the dispute between Devon Malcolm and Ray Illingworth. That clearly is a clash of personalities and, as a member of the parliamentary Labour party, I know what it is to be on the rough end of the tongue of a blunt-speaking northerner. None the less, it is a shame that a cricketer as dignified, modest and hard-working as Devon Malcolm should feel for a minute that he is being picked out for abuse and treated in a derogatory way because of his ethnic origin. I hope that that matter will be cleared up.

It is an honour to play for England—whether at cricket, football or any other sport—and people take it seriously, whatever their colour. The idea that anyone should be treated in a certain way because of their ethnic origin is very sad. I hope that the dispute between Devon Malcolm and Ray Illingworth does not continue, and that any black man playing cricket for England will feel that he is being treated in exactly the same way—for good or ill—as his white colleagues.

My final point falls outside the remit of the Minister—sports broadcasting. It is all very well to talk about the money that is going into sport from this deal and that deal, but it would be a great shame if the young working-class boys and girls about whom I talked were denied the widest possible access to sport because of short-term profits made through deals with satellite or other broadcasters. In the end, sport is not the property of the premier league or of the management of satellite broadcasters—it is the property of the people. This House should stand up for a broadcasting regulatory regime that ensures that as many people as possible have access to our great national sports.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I hope that I have brought a different perspective to it. It is important to mark the achievements of our black sportsmen, who sometimes feel that they do not receive the credit they should. As a Member of Parliament, I can raise issues that individual black sportsmen and women cannot raise, but I can assure the House that these issues are deeply felt. I hope that in forming sports policy, the House will bear them in mind.

1.22 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I am faintly astonished to find myself participating in a debate on sport. I do not claim to be an avid follower although, like many of my constituents, I had a brief frisson of excitement when Colchester United made it to the play-offs for promotion to the second division. Sadly, its hopes were dashed by Plymouth.

I am an even less enthusiastic participant in sport. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister is temporarily absent, as he is one of the few in the House who will understand when I say that, at school, I was forced to play a weekly game of fives, as well as a peculiarly brutal game known as Winchester college football, which normally resulted in substantial injuries to the participants. I was also required to fill in a daily record of the amount of exercise that I had taken. A consequence was that I became an expert in forgery and other means of avoiding recording physical effort. But I accept, in retrospect, that it was a sensible way of trying to ensure that pupils undertake daily sport. I am sure that it was as a result of my hon. Friend's similar experience of that regime that he has now attached such importance to trying to get pupils to participate in sport. That is something which I strongly support.

One of the biggest changes that we have seen in sport in the past few years is the amount of money available to it. Almost every sport would be able to make the case as to why it should receive more money, but we should recognise that the funding of sport has been transformed for two principal reasons. The first is the advent of the national lottery. Almost everyone now accepts that the lottery has been a great success—£1.7 billion has been raised for good causes, £200 million of which has gone into sport. It is particularly welcome that the majority of that money has gone into small local sporting bodies, and allowed them to undertake projects which, often, they would otherwise have found to be impossible. In the past few weeks, I have had an excellent example of that in my constituency with the grant of almost £16,000 to Great Totham cricket club. That will allow it to build a new pavilion, which will be ready at the start of next season. That is extremely good news and exactly the type of project that the lottery should be used to finance.

The other principal cause of the extra money going into sport is, as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, the sale of rights for the broadcasting of sporting events on television. That is an issue which, even now, we are debating in Committee on the Broadcasting Bill. It is important that we place on record in today's debate the benefits that sporting bodies have enjoyed as a result of the money they have received from the sale of transmission rights. That has largely happened as a result of the advent of subscription sports channels, and in particular BSkyB.

A recent letter to *The Times* was signed by the chief executive of the Rugby Football League, the secretary of the Royal and Ancient golf club, the secretary of the Rugby Football Union, the chief executive of the Football Association, the executive director of the Lawn Tennis Association and the chief executive of the Test and County Cricket Board. They represent almost all the major sporting bodies and they wrote:

"In the past five years the cosy terrestrial duopoly has been broken and a true market established for sporting rights. The financial benefits flowing from this have enabled us to provide better stadia and better training facilities, more help for the stars of tomorrow and, crucially, a better prospect of higher standards of achievement on the field."

I understand the concern of those who believe that the major sporting events should continue to be available free to air on the terrestrial channels. The right way to address that issue is by seeking a voluntary agreement and a code of conduct. I welcome the efforts that have already been made to achieve that. The Government have decided to go further and to reinforce the code through the existing list of national events that cannot be shown exclusively live on subscription channels. I have to say that I feel somewhat uncomfortable at any statutory measure, first on a matter of principle, because I believe that sporting bodies should be free to sell their rights when and how they wish. I also feel some misgivings on the matter of

practice, because the existence of such restrictions is bound to diminish the amount of money that will be available to sport as a result of those sales. I am glad therefore that the Government have decided to resist those who have called for the list to be extended and kept it to the small number of events that were originally drawn up following the passage of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Even that decision carries with it some dangers, because although in most cases the events on the list are specific, single sporting events, the inclusion of all cricket matches involving England will obviously have a significant impact on the amount of money available to cricket. I know that that is of some concern to the Test and County Cricket Board. It is noticeable, for instance, that the same does not apply in football, where the only category involving football matches played by England on that list of major sporting events is the World cup finals. It may be rather optimistic to assume that that will involve England, but one lives in hope.

Several hon. Members have already mentioned the deal between BSkyB and the premier league which was announced last night. That offers a further demonstration of the benefits that football, and obviously the premier league, will enjoy as a result of the sale of broadcast rights.

The other proposal in the Bill covering the transmission of sporting events that is causing some concern is that of separating unused rights so that the broadcaster with the right to live transmissions must make available highlights to other broadcasters. It is a complicated area. The highlights, for example, of a horse race, which may last for about four minutes, are likely to be very different from the highlights of a one-day cricket match or, even more so, from the highlights of a tennis tournament, which could last for two weeks. I consider the best approach to be by way of voluntary agreements, which could be individually tailored to each sport. The attempt by means of the Bill to set rigid rules covering all sport will, I suspect, lead to considerable difficulties. It could result in serious losses to sports. I have no doubt that we shall discuss the issues further in Committee.

For the remainder of my remarks I shall concentrate on a sport that I believe is being treated extremely unfairly. The matter was originally brought to my attention by one of my constituents, Mr. Patrick Chaplin of Maldon, who is an historian of the game of darts.

Thousands of people in this country play darts. Probably half, if not more, of our pubs have darts teams. More than 25,000 players are members of the British Darts Organisation, which is a founder member of the World Darts Federation, which in turn represents about 500,000 players in over 50 countries worldwide.

The game of darts was invented in the United Kingdom. It requires good sportsmanship, skill, team spirit, long hours of practice and strict adherence to the rules of the game. Yet according to the Sports Council, darts is not a sport. That is a cause of considerable resentment among those who are keen players.

When I raised the matter with my hon. Friend the Minister, he wrote as follows:

"The Sports Council has developed its own system of recognition, based on a number of principles, to decide which activities and organisations should be eligible for support. Predominant amongst the criteria against which the Sports Council assess suitability for recognition is a requirement for physical effort."

My hon. Friend understands that it was mainly on that count that the Sports Council decided that darts did not warrant priority for formal recognition of the activity.

Many darts players would dispute such claims. They would testify that it requires a high degree of physical fitness, mental agility and stamina to play darts. The argument breaks down entirely, however, when we consider other sporting activities that the Sports Council recognises as sports, including snooker, pool, ballroom dancing, ballooning, arm wrestling and baton twirling. Until recently, camping and caravaning were classified as sports. I see no reason why the council should continue to claim that darts is different from the activities to which I have referred and should not be classified as a sport.

England leads the world in darts. At the recent World Darts Federation World cup in Switzerland, English players won every gold medal. In doing so they beat players from 40 other countries. The teams over which they triumphed included those from Australia, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. In every instance the Governments of the other countries support darts and recognise darts as a sport.

On Sunday, one of my constituents, Mr. Kevin Painter of Tiptree, will be defending his title as winner of the England open championship. The women's world No. 2 player, Deta Hedman, lives just outside my constituency in Witham. Possibly the best-known darts referee in the world, Mr. Martin Fitzmaurice, lives in Colchester, as does Bobby George, who is one of our most successful players and probably the best-known darts personality in the world. My hon. Friend will understand, therefore, why this issue provokes extremely strong feelings in my constituency.

Each year, BBC Sport televises the Embassy world professional darts championship, which is watched by perhaps 5 million people. Clearly, the BBC recognises darts as a sport. The greatest darts player of all time, Mr. Eric Bristow, was awarded an MBE for services to sport, so even Her Majesty the Queen recognises that darts is a sport. The only organisation in the world that appears to take a contrary view is the Sports Council. It is high time that that was changed. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to intervene and to tell the Sports Council to think again.

1.34 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Unlike the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), I am very much involved in sport. In my mind, I have represented my country in every sport other than synchronised swimming. That was for some time, although not for a long period, recognised as an Olympic sport, but display sports are no longer part of the Olympic games.

Archery has been in the Olympic games and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that darts is a recognised sport and should be included in them. As he rightly said, given the amount of expertise that we have, we will achieve a clean sweep of gold medals. If we get around to staging the Olympic games in this country, I hope that we will put in darts as one of the preferred Olympic games sports, which we would welcome. The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point and I take it seriously.

Like others, I welcome this debate. I thought that it was finely chosen to coincide with the eve of Euro 96, but when I heard the Minister speak, I realised that that was

[Mr. Tony Banks]

not the case, although hon. Members on both sides of the House have taken the opportunity to remind the House that we are looking forward to the championships, which start tomorrow.

I am also slightly saddened by the small attendance in the House. Sporting issues and sport generally are such an important subject to the people whom we represent. I am not alone—far from it—in reading my newspaper starting from the back page and working through to less serious matters on the front page. Sport is a significant social-cementing element in this country. Like the weather, it is a subject that everyone has an opinion on and wants to talk about. Hon. Members should recognise its significance.

My very good hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made by far and away the best speech of the day. She raised some crucial issues. I was especially taken—when I heard her say it, I thought, "Yes, of course"—by her comment that 25 per cent. of all premier league players are of Afro-Caribbean origin, yet only 1 or 2 per cent. of premier league crowds are of Afro-Caribbean origin. The number increases as we go down the leagues because the amount of racism declines as we go down the leagues, but she is right to draw attention to that fact and to the question of physiological differences.

Sir Roger Bannister was talking clumsily about black athletes. At one time, people thought that black athletes were good only in explosive events such as the 100 or 200 m. Then the Kenyans and Ethiopians suddenly had all these long-distance runners and people had to readjust their peculiar theories. It is all about opportunity, training facilities and coaching. It has nothing to do with skin colour. I love that advertisement with the different brain sizes, where the black and white brains are the same size and the only small brain is that of the racist. My hon. Friend raised some exceedingly good points.

Being Minister for sport is not so much a job as a sending to heaven without having to die first, although the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) proved that it was possible to become the Minister for sport and die a death subsequently.

I want to raise a few points about Euro 96. We are looking forward to, I hope, a great festival of football in this country, but the Government have failed to rise to the occasion. The £100,000 that the Government have provided to help the eight cities celebrate that great event is insignificant compared with the income that the Government will receive in taxation. Euro 96 remains a great opportunity to promote different parts of this country throughout the tournament. It is typical of the Government that they have failed to respond imaginatively. I will inject party politics into the debate: it is typical of the Government also that the millennium has crept up and caught them by surprise. There have been 996 years to think about the millennium. Here we are four years away and suddenly someone says, "My God! It's the millennium in four years. Someone should have told us." Pathetic, but typical of the Government's approach to visionary politics. They do not have any vision.

I have heard some disturbing stories about the opening ceremony for Euro 96. It is sounding a bit like a second-rate pantomime. I hope that I am wrong. If not, that will be another lost opportunity to celebrate the great game of soccer. Of course Euro 96 is a competitive tournament, but it is also a festival of European football. The opening ceremony should emphasise not division but the commonality and mutuality that come through the great sport of football in Europe.

I am dreading an extension of the farcical Euro-beef war to the football pitch. Hooliganism is a sad feature of the modern game, but as someone who goes to a football match nearly every Saturday, I know that it is a minority activity. Unfortunately, it tends to poison the entire game. The police in England—rather than in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland—have become the best in the world at dealing with soccer hooliganism. It is regrettable that they have found it necessary to accumulate such expertise. I believe that I was the first to suggest in the House a national intelligence system in football. The then Home Secretary rejected that idea out of hand, but some years later it was found opportune to introduce such a system. The only way of dealing with the hooligan minority is to eliminate their activities at the source. That can be done only by having all possible information about them and their plans.

I believe that the police will be able to handle any likely problems at Euro 96, and there will be some. The police have not been helped by the chaotic ticket sales. It will be extraordinary difficult for the police to segregate fans from different countries. Last week's *Sunday Mirror* had a story about a couple of convicted Italian terrorists who were selling tickets in London, having been approved by the Italian national ticket agency. That sort of incident is an enormous loophole in the ticket allocation system.

It has been estimated that the extra cost of policing Euro 96 will be £5 million. When I asked the Home Secretary yesterday whether he intended to make more resources available so that the cost did not fall on council tax payers in London and other parts of the country, he went thermo-nuclear on me. I do not understand why he went completely berserk. I thought that the Home Secretary had flipped, and I was waiting for the men in white coats to come in and drag him off. It seems that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was not prepared to answer a quiet and rational question in a quiet and rational way. Perhaps the Home Secretary was not expecting such a question from me. He certainly will not get one in future, if that is the way he behaves when I ask about additional resources so that council tax payers do not have an extra burden to bear, given that the Government are getting enough in receipts to make extra resources available.

It was a pity that, at the same time as the police were arresting suspected football hooligans throughout the country, some members of the England team were rearranging the fixtures and fittings on an aircraft returning from Hong Kong. I do not know to what extent the lurid stories in the newspapers are true, but I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). The Football Association, by failing to deal immediately with the issue, managed to turn an incident into a drama.

The behaviour of some of our footballers, especially the English ones, is absolutely pathetic. It is almost as though nature perversely put the talent in the feet, but removed the brain. The way that some of the players

behave is most regrettable. I cannot imagine players like Matthews, Finney, Moore or Charlton conducting themselves in the way that Gazza does.

We all know that there is an awful lot of money floating around in the game at the moment. Some of the players do not seem able to handle all that money. They think that normal human behaviour patterns should not apply to them and that they can behave like drunken pop stars. It is not good enough. I do not want to be as rigorous as the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), but I agree that the FA must demand and require a higher standard of conduct from players.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington referred to black role models. Footballers are role models for white and black communities. They should bear that in mind. We do not expect them to behave like saints—after all, no one could say that we do—but we expect a reasonable amount of intelligent behaviour.

I am glad that money is now coming into the game. For too long, it was short-changed by its own authorities, in their deals with the broadcasters, and by those making a large amount of money from merchandising. Now, the money is rightfully coming into the game, but unfortunately a great deal of it is being concentrated in the hands of too few players and clubs. An enormous deal has been done between the Football Association, BSkyB and the BBC—£730 million for the next four years. We should contrast that with the £2.5 million a year being paid just a few years ago. All that money should not go to just a few clubs. Essentially, it will go to the premier league clubs, and only a minority of those.

We do not want the money to be handled in that way. It should be used to nourish the grass-roots of football and to provide more facilities for spectators. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) was absolutely right to say that many, many ordinary people are being priced out of the game. Season tickets are very expensive. I am lucky I can afford one for Chelsea, but it cost me £630 to renew it. Admission charges exclude the unemployed, people on social security and young people who are not earning. Football cannot continue to ignore the generations of fans yet to come. Some of the money coming into the game should be used to provide concessionary tickets so that the next generation of football fans can gain admission to matches.

Of course, I accept that we need better facilities—in particular, a much better national soccer stadium. Quite frankly, Wembley is not where that stadium should be. Wembley is a disgrace. Having seen some of the stadiums around the world, I am ashamed that that is where the finals will be played. It and its facilities are an absolute and utter disgrace, as are the transport services to get people there. Wembley keeps being tarted up, but its age and crumbling nature cannot be disguised. I have been thinking about what it reminds me of—it is Barbara Cartland. It has had an interesting, romantic past, but all the paint in the world cannot camouflage its decrepitude.

Lady Olga Maitland: That is horrid.

Mr. Banks: Yes, but so is the person to whom I referred and so is the national stadium.

We need a new national soccer stadium, but it certainly should not be at Wembley. If it does end up at Wembley, the people who have run Wembley into the ground should not be allowed to operate the new stadium. I think that it should be built in London. After all, it is the capital city. People from abroad want to come to London. It is the capital city, and that is where the new soccer stadium should be located—I think that it should be in docklands.

It is great that we were able to attract Euro 96. It is a pity that we have not been able to secure the Olympic games. The International Olympic Committee would award the games only to London—so Manchester and Birmingham can forget it—but they will not be awarded to London until we have a local authority for London. That statement is not mine—me being prejudiced in my desire for a strategic local authority for London—but it is what the IOC said. The IOC will not do a deal with the Government, with the City of London or with an amalgamation of boroughs. It will do a deal only with a strategic authority for London. Until we have one, even London can forget about hosting the Olympic games.

We do not need to have Wembley—tired, clapped-out or even revamped Wembley—as a stadium. We need a new, purpose-built athletics and swimming complex, in London, to attract the Olympic games in 2008, for example. I have the site; it is Stratford. We could construct a complex over the new international station which is being built, and that will enable us to put in a successful bid for the year 2008.

I should like to mention an interesting report from the Council of Europe which I was involved in discussing recently. The report was on discrimination against women in the Olympics. We heard evidence from an organisation called Atlanta Plus, which is campaigning on the issue of discrimination against women. At the Barcelona Olympics, 35 countries had no female representation. In certain cases, that was because the countries were too small to have women athletes of Olympic standard. But that begs the question: why did they not have such women athletes? It was because training and coaching facilities were denied to women in those countries.

Some countries deliberately exclude women from participating in sports. I must name Iran, which has explicitly banned women from most sports. It banned women from attending soccer matches and has advised women that the only sports in which they can participate are those that they can play while wearing a veil. That is a pretty tricky thing to have to do in sports—except perhaps in darts. So far as I am aware, however, that is not a particularly popular sport in Iran.

Iran even refused to allow a female athlete to lead the national delegation at the Barcelona Olympics. Whatever we call it, that is sexism, and it conflicts entirely with the Olympic charter. I am not making an anti-Islamic point, although that is often how such points are misconstrued. The Olympic charter is quite specific about the matter and states:

"any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, sex or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement."

It is a fact that certain Islamic countries are defying the international Olympic charter. If they are doing that, they should be asked to leave. It is a free association, and if they do not like the rules, they can leave the Olympic movement.

I believe that the IOC should stop ducking this issue. I should be very interested to hear whether the Minister has had thoughts on this matter and whether he has discussed the issue of discrimination against women with the British Olympic Committee.

[Mr. Banks]

Those are the points that I wanted to raise. It has been an interesting and a varied debate. I am most grateful to have been allowed to take part in it.

1.53 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks). I find myself sharing rather more of his passions than I expected I would. I certainly agree with him about Chelsea—although, sadly, my expression of enthusiasm for that team is more passive than I would like. However, I must part company with him on his comments about Barbara Cartland. I must also remind him that there is a world outside London. The national stadium should be built in the midlands.

I had intended to cede my opportunity to speak in this debate to the real experts, but the promotion of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe)—who is, no doubt, the greatest expert in the House on sport—which has given a new meaning to the phrase "running Whip", has denied us the opportunity of hearing his remarks.

I am concerned about the situation facing cricket in my county, and that is the matter that I should like to draw to the attention of the House today.

I suppose that sport is about fitness, loyalty and competition. Rather like my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), I cannot pretend that fitness is my strong suit, but I hope that my ministerial colleagues will feel that loyalty and competition are. I was once selected for my local swimming club, but the postcard arrived two days late and I missed the event. I made it to first boat cox at university, which may surprise some hon. Members, and I achieved a classic wash-off as a second boat cox—I shall explain the technique afterwards to anyone who is interested. I found myself surf bathing with the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on a remote Cornish beach last week, but I was not wearing a wetsuit—so that is one up to the Tories—and I look forward to a game of skittles in Evesham this evening.

That is about the extent of my sporting credentials, but I am an enthusiastic member of Worcestershire county cricket club. I should also add that if any of the organisations that I list in the Register of Members' Interests advise any of the interests that I will mention, I was not aware of it and I certainly do not advise them myself.

I had hoped to speak at some length about the Government's very welcome policy developments for sport in schools, but I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after I have spoken and to speak on that topic. In any event, I have nothing of substance to add to my hon. Friend the Minister's most welcome comments on the matter. I therefore deal mainly with sport after school.

It is important that we encourage people to be observers and participants, but I take the view that the best kind of observer is the live spectator, not the passive television viewer. Armchair supporters have their place—sadly, that is my role with Chelsea—but we need crowds. As the hon. Member for Newham, North–West said, we need crowds who can afford to get to games for the atmosphere, to provide money for clubs and to encourage new participants. My concern is that sport should be an enjoyable live experience for the spectator and the participant and that more money should be made available for investment in sport. It is common ground among the parties that money is needed to achieve excellence, which leads me to some specific observations about the lottery and broadcasting.

On broadcasting, I understand the view of those, including several constituents who have written to me, who prefer the status quo and like as many sports as possible on BBC 1, BBC 2 and the ITV channels. The question that we have to ask ourselves in all honesty is whether we can turn back the tide. King Canute sought to show his courtiers that he could not do that; I am rather worried that the House is still in danger of misinterpreting King Canute and is seeking to hold back a tide that is in fact irresistible.

What has television done for sport? Sport has entered a free and highly competitive broadcasting market. Until recently many, if not most, of the country's sports suffered from chronic underexposure and a lack of funds. They were constrained by the relatively small sums on offer from the terrestrial broadcasters and the lack of available channels on which to appear. It is important to remember that the satellite and cable channels are offering expanded opportunities for people to enjoy sport and are not just adding money to the games.

Many sporting authorities have made it absolutely clear—my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon cited a letter in yesterday's edition of *The Times* in this respect—that the new competition for broadcasting rights from BSkyB and others has resulted in millions of pounds of additional funding going to sport. We all know what happened to football yesterday.

The revolution is not limited to BSkyB, satellite or cable broadcasting, nor to Britain. It is a global revolution involving worldwide technological advances. Subscription-funded thematic channels and on-demand viewing are international developments on which we must not turn our back.

The consultation paper that the Government issued in, I think, February this year sought to set out the dilemmas. The Government recognised that the crown jewels of British sport could quickly become devalued if sport did not have the money to reinvest in the superstars of tomorrow and the necessary facilities.

I am worried, however, that the way in which the Broadcasting Bill is developing means that we are putting listed events into too tight a legislative straitjacket. We are penalising the most successful and popular events, causing serious distortions in the market and a serious loss of earnings. I know that the Test and County Cricket Board has particularly acute concerns in that connection.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon, I believe that the voluntary code is the right way to proceed. I believe that, because I know that the sports bodies themselves understand that they have a duty not only to maximise income to ensure that their sports succeed, but to seek the widest possible coverage for those sports. There is always a conflict between those two objectives, but it is better to leave it to the sports themselves to resolve rather than trying to do it by statute.

Turning to more local concerns, my constituency of Worcester is lucky in that we are developing three centres of excellence for specific sports: rowing, rugby and cricket. Rowing has been a huge beneficiary of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, an organisation that we have not heard enough about in the debate. I am deeply grateful to the foundation for all that it is doing both for sport and for the arts in my constituency. As a result, we are building up in the west midlands a real centre of excellence for rowing and for related water-borne activities such as dragon boating. Sportsmatch has been an invaluable component in enabling that sport to develop locally. The Government's money to match private sponsorship is making an important contribution.

Another Government initiative has probably made the biggest and most dramatic impact on sport in my constituency; I refer to rugby. Worcester rugby football club is the recipient of £1.3 million of lottery money. I know how much the club welcomes that huge sum. In 1992, before the lottery, the club wanted to construct a training shed—it was little more than that—to provide facilities for young rugby players in the youth and mini category. I am glad to say that the immediate past chairman of Worcester rugby football club, David Hallmark, in consultation with the North Midlands Rugby Football Union, managed to get Worcester identified as a club suitable to establish a centre of excellence for youth rugby. There has been a tremendous commitment to that process under successive chairmen of the club, including individuals such as Brian Wilkes, Colin Major and David Arr.

As a result, the idea has been taken forward to a triumphant conclusion. The application for a much more sophisticated facility was made to the Sports Council in June 1995. The application was successful and Worcester received what I believe is the largest single award made to a sports club—£1.3 million. Worcester rugby football club was delighted with that result.

If time permitted, I would draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to a number of detailed concerns relating to the expense involved in making an application and the retentions during the construction period, which have posed certain difficulties for the club. However, I must not mar its overall delight at what has been achieved.

The lottery has produced huge sums for activities other than rugby, which is a huge tribute to the success of Camelot. To be partisan for a moment, we need to worry a great deal about the Opposition's threat that they would nationalise the management of the lottery, to put it on a non-profit basis. That might satisfy a few Opposition Members' consciences—old Labour consciences—but it would lead to a dramatic reduction in funds for the good causes that the lottery was set up to benefit. We should remember that clearly. The ideas emerging from the Opposition could lead to a halving of the money available for good causes.

Cricket has not received a huge sum from the national lottery. About £7 million has been received to date for the recreational game—for local teams rather than for the county sides. The national lottery has so far provided no money for a county project. The counties fear that the managers of the funds at the Sports Council are worried that they might be criticised if they gave money to so-called fat cats and that that is why they are concentrating on the smaller, more local teams. That is damaging and wrong.

I have already talked about the problems that the TCCB faces in relation to broadcasting. The total income of all 18 counties of the TCCB is less than that of Manchester United, which is just one football club. I understand that there is an application before the Sports Council from Hampshire, but that it has been deferred. That application is for additional playing and coaching facilities, so it is as much about participation as about spectating.

Many other counties want to submit schemes that contain participatory components, such as cricket centres, cricket schools and playing areas for junior cricket. The signs are that the Sports Council is reluctant to fund county arenas. It does not recognise that the additional income generated would help the counties to achieve their participatory objectives.

Worcester has a tremendous record of development. We have employed a cricket development officer, Mark Scott, for four years. He spends the autumn and spring going round the 200 schools in Hereford and Worcester and helping them to develop cricketing skills. In the winter months, two of the professionals, Gavin Haynes and Stuart Lampitt, are employed as cricket development coaches. We shall take on one more in the coming year and another one the year after that. That is a tremendous achievement and shows my club's commitment to developing participation. I hope that national lottery money can help it build on that process more rapidly.

Cricket broadcasting is in a terrible position. To list just the domestic test matches—180 hours—is the equivalent of listing just the 180 minutes of the FA cup final and the World cup final in football. Worcester is suffering a bit of a double whammy at present with the inadequate resources from broadcasting—in contrast to what football enjoys—and being unable to get its hands on lottery money.

Worcester has a big scheme for a new school—the Basil D'Oliveira cricket centre scheme. It is a multi-million pound development and it will revolutionise cricket in my county. I sincerely hope that national lottery money will be forthcoming to fund it.

2.5 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I should like to offer you a word of advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and suggest that you begin your day by turning to the back of the newspaper and reading the sports pages, because the sports pages always have the good news. Let me draw attention to some of the headlines in *The Daily Telegraph* today, such as, "England already set fair for victory", or "Gooch sets the pace in plunder", or "Openers in punishing form". They are all stories of victory, success and achievement. However, there are concerns behind that achievement.

I am particularly concerned about the fact that we seem to have become a nation of couch potatoes—hugely unfit. An analysis by the Health Education Authority makes sobering reading. It shows that obesity has more than doubled in the past 10 years, and that the proportion of men who are seriously overweight has nearly doubled. In addition, one third of the population lead almost completely sedentary lives.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

As we are already very much aware, children are extremely unfit. Instead of going out on the sports field, they spend an average of 25 hours a week watching television, in short about two and a half hours per day sitting in front of the television or their computers—longer than they spend per week on sport.

I warmly welcome the crusade—and I put it that way—that my hon. Friend the Minister began two years ago to bring sport back into schools. I also welcome the document "Sport: Raising the Game", but it included the following comment:

"Sport no longer commands the place it once did in school life".

My hon. Friend therefore deserves three cheers for making an enormous effort to upgrade sport in schools.

I am concerned, however, that my hon. Friend's endeavours could be undermined by the national curriculum. Wittingly or unwittingly, there seem to be serious omissions. My hon. Friend's stated aspiration is two hours' formal, timetabled sport a week, with four hours' extra-curricular sport. However, I note that the national curriculum document on sport produced by the Department for Education and Employment does not make that a statutory obligation. Indeed, it does not say exactly how many hours should be spent on sport. Unless we pin schools down and make it statutory, schools that are lethargic and lack enthusiasm for sport will wriggle out of it. The only way round the problem is not only to encourage the establishment of sportsmark criteria to measure a school's progress in sport, but to go much further and pin the schools down and find out exactly what they are doing and how it is being timetabled.

A press release put out by the National Association of Head Teachers supports the idea of sport, but then starts wriggling off the hook, expressing concerns about timetabling and other activities. We then discover the real reason why sport has slipped off the agenda. It has become a victim of political correctness and socialism. Sadly, I am bringing a political aspect into the debate, but socialist dogma is to keep everyone on an even keel and not to push anyone to do anything. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said that he did not believe in compulsory team sport, and that is really where we go wrong.

If they could get away with it, every child would far rather stay in the classroom by the radiator than go out on the sports field in the middle of winter. We must get them out of that classroom and on to the sports field, because it is of enormous benefit. Children who are not achieving in school will find that they can do very well on the sports field. They will feel that they have got somewhere and get a sense of pride. When they return to the classroom, they will go to their work with a will and energy that they did not have before. Their self-esteem will go up. The relationship between the children and the teachers who coach the children out of hours will be enhanced when the discipline that they have managed to pull together on the field is transposed to the classroom. The children will get on much more in their school careers.

Time is against me, but I should like to stress how important it is that my hon. Friend the Minister has devoted his efforts to raising the profile of sports in schools. It is vital to improve our children's health and makes them fit citizens—fit for life. That is the essence of my hon. Friend's drive. It will enable us to be proud of our young people as they go out into the world—whether they join the Army, go into commerce or become successful athletes. Wherever they go, they can hold their heads high and say, "I won a cup at school. What an achievement!"

2.11 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I should like to place on record how proud I am to come from Britain's first national city of sport, Sheffield, with our magnificent array of facilities. I know that members of the Select Committee on National Heritage looked very closely at those facilities while they were compiling their report on facilities and sport. They certainly congratulated not only the city council but the wider Sheffield community, including the private sector, on their effort in developing the facilities and the successful part that they played in the regeneration of our city.

Last year, the city's facilities were used by more than 2 million people and they have hosted successful teams such as the Sheffield Eagles, the Sheffield Sharks and the Sheffield Steelers. More important, the facilities are regularly used by the local community and, indeed, the wider community. Although the élite, such as the national diving team, use the facilities, they are also used regularly by disabled people. Only last Saturday, I saw the national disabled swimming championships. Indeed, the city hosted the special Olympics a couple of years ago. It is right that the whole community should be able to enjoy sport.

I am delighted by the lottery grant that Sheffield United cricket club has received to develop in my constituency an indoor cricket school. It will be used by the local community and by local schools, and it will be designed specifically for use by disabled people. That is positive, but I am cautious. Owing to problems of running costs, it will be difficult for many projects in inner-city and deprived communities to get off the ground. They will simply be unable to find either the matching funding or the running costs funding. I listened carefully to what the Minister said earlier, and I hope that there will be flexibility in those areas.

The bulk of what I want to say concerns the European football championships. I say to the Government, "Why don't you join in as well?" It is almost as if they are saying that the championships are for everybody else—the Football Association, UEFA, football clubs and local authorities—and that they will simply be spectators. The Government should be taking a lead, and ensuring that the event is a celebration of football in this country, during which we can welcome guests from abroad and put on a magnificent display for them of the best of British life.

According to figures that I obtained from the local authority yesterday, Sheffield expects the cost of staging an excellent cultural and sports festival, extra litter clearing, the provision of a camp site, road closures and all the other things associated with such events to come to about £250,000. The cost of policing, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) drew attention, has also to be found by the local community.

By way of response, the Government have offered only £12,000 of direct funding—£12,000 against a total cost of £250,000. Even when matching funding for sponsorship

is included, the total Government provision is still only £50,000. A local supermarket firm in the area, Morrison's, has contributed £40,000, which is only £10,000 less than the Government are providing.

It is nonsense for the Government to stand on one side and say that the people of Sheffield, Newcastle, Nottingham, Manchester and the other cities that are hosting events should be responsible for providing the funds, when the Government are receiving £7 million in extra VAT receipts from ticket sales alone. That is wrong. It is time the Government put their hand in their pocket and said that local communities should not suffer.

In particular, the Government should consider the policing costs. Policing will not involve a simple matter of extra costs for communities. Given that police authorities, like every other local authority, are capped—certainly South Yorkshire is—the result will be not extra costs, but less policing for the community during the rest of the year. There will be fewer police services and less attention to law and order, simply because the Government will not cover the extra costs.

That is not right, and it is not how we should be approaching the championships. The Government have a responsibility to help, and to realise that Euro 96 is a national event. The nation is putting it on, and responsibility does not lie just with football authorities and local authorities. I hope that the Minister will respond positively, because at this stage the Government should not be standing on one side and saying, "It's not our responsibility."

2.15 pm

Mr. Pendry: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This has been an interesting debate, and I think that everyone who wanted to speak has done so. The Minister has asked to be given a few minutes to reply to it, and I concur with that idea. I hope that he has taken note of some of the important points that have been made in the debate and that, although he will not be able to reply to them all verbally, he will be able to respond later to the hon. Members who made them.

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) was right to highlight the importance of Euro 96, and equally right to say that the state-of-the-art stadiums in our country will be less effective than they might be if we do not use them to attract the Olympics and other international sporting events.

Last month, the Government said that lottery money could be made available for major sporting events—but, again, not this year, and not for the major sporting event of Euro 96. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney also talked about tickets being marked "Restricted View". I must tell him that UEFA organised the advertising round the ground at Wembley, so the Football Association cannot be held responsible for that problem.

I thank the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for pointing out that I am a moderate and restrained man in that I did not mention the fact that my team, Derby County, got into the premiership. The hon. Gentleman was right; I am both of those things, but I restricted the length of my speech so that more hon. Members could speak, and I had intended to mention Derby County at the end. None the less, I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's congratulations to Derby County in time for next season.

The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) praised the police for their efforts during the build-up to the tournament—a subject also touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). The Association of Chief Police Officers estimates that it will cost about £10 million to police the tournament, but the Home Office has allocated only £100,000. As my hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe said, that could lead to inadequate policing in some areas during the rest of the year.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) did not let down his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell)—at least, he did not in the little that I heard of his speech as, for unavoidable reasons, I had to leave the Chamber for a time. So far as I know, he did not mention the very sporting South African tie that he is wearing, although he did mention apartheid and the importance of what is happening in South Africa.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) is a brave man to say that he is a Middlesbrough supporter these days. It is not generally known that he was a scout for that football club. My hon. Friend was generous in his praise for the charter for football. Within that framework, we shall introduce legislative measures to tackle hooliganism—increasing restriction orders and punishment levels, and tightening the laws on racial abuse—to broaden the appeal of the game.

I am pleased to report that 20 per cent. of the people who have bought tickets for Euro 96 are women, compared with only 13 per cent. of those who go to premiership matches.

The hon. Member for Welwyn and Hatfield (Mr. Evans), in a temperate and moderate speech—*[Laughter.]* Certainly the first part of it was. He should concentrate on sporting matters rather than make his usual utterances. It is perhaps not generally known that he played football for Aston Villa and cricket for Warwickshire, and I hope that he will stick to sporting matters in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was right to emphasise the importance of black sportsmen and women in this country and the fact that they do not receive the recognition that they richly deserve. She talked about the continuing racism in sport, and she will know that Labour's football charter makes a specific pledge to tighten the section of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 to which she referred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) welcomed the money that is coming into football, but said that it was not reaching the right quarters. He said that ticket prices ought to be reduced, and that some of the money should go to the smaller clubs. Labour's charter says that a percentage of money should go to the Football Trust to reinvest in the lower divisions of the football league.

Finally, I concur with those who described the debate as stimulating and interesting. Although I was critical of him earlier, we should all thank the Minister for giving us the opportunity to have the debate. Although there are differences between the parties, we are here because we all love sport and we recognise its importance in society. Long may we have such debates, but I ask him to use his influence to ensure that we have such debates at a proper time in future to enable more hon. Members to take part.

2.20 pm

Mr. Sproat: I agree with the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) that it is extremely important to have sports debates. I should like to have them on a day other than Friday so that we can command a wider audience. However, the quality of the debate has been high, and it has helped to continue the momentum of raising the profile of sport.

When opening the debate this morning, I said that I would try to pick up on the points made in it during my winding-up speech. I shall try to do so in the short time available, but I can assure the House that I will read *Hansard* and reply by letter to hon. Members who raised matters that I do not have time to deal with verbally.

We have had a varied debate. One of the varieties was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff)—the issue of television sports rights. Other hon. Members referred to the matter in the context of the premier league deal that has just been announced. The whole question of television sports rights, the listed events and people's ability to watch sport on television is extremely difficult.

On the one hand, many sports rely more and more on the money that comes from television sports rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester mentioned cricket; I believe that more than 40 per cent. of the income of English cricket now comes from television rights. On the other hand, we must remember the grass-roots of sport and those who cannot get to sports grounds and depend on television if they want to watch sport. If events are not broadcast on free-to-air television, but on a subscription or pay-to-view channel, many people will be prevented from watching their favourite sport. This is a genuine dilemma with which we are dealing in the Broadcasting Bill, and I expect that we will come back to the matter on Report.

In the meantime, I should like to pay particular tribute to the work of the Central Council of Physical Recreation and its major sports division for working out what would appear to be a working compromise. We will discuss it, but the House may not accept it—it is a voluntary agreement in any case. The idea that an event should be shown live on free-to-air television and the highlights broadcast on a subscription or pay-to-view channel, or the other way around, shows that the sports bodies understand the importance of ensuring that the bulk of our sport ought to be available on television. At the same time, we must not withdraw from sport the huge amount of money that television rights have generated.

As for the premier league, I was extremely pleased that Mr. Rick Parry said that he hopes that a substantial amount of the money will be ploughed back into youth sport. That is extremely important. It is also extremely important, however, to remember that the rights are the assets of the sports governing bodies, and Parliament should be wary about taking away from them those things that belong to them. We must try to find a way through so that the sports bodies can keep the money to plough into their sport, but at the same time ensure that the bulk of the population can continue to watch that sport on television.

The European championships, which start tomorrow, were naturally mentioned frequently. They are a wonderful opportunity for this country to show its sporting prowess, hospitality and tourist attractions. That is why the Government decided in negotiations with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and others to put many hundreds of thousands of pounds into the championships. Some £400,000 has been put into them, of which £100,000 came from Government grant, £150,000 from sportsmatch, which should be matched by others, and £150,000 from the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts. Money was also put in by the Football Trust and the Football Association. The Government have reached a reasonable compromise on something that is, after all, football's own occasion. The provision of additional money is a matter for those towns and cities that will benefit in many ways. They got the Government help for which they asked, although we know that they would like more.

The championships should be an occasion on which—let us hope—British football shows itself to better effect than it has done recently. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) made an extremely important point when he said that the press too often pick on just the bad news, whether about football or something else. I hope that some self-restraint, balance and a sense of perspective will be shown by the press about Euro 96 and many another matter. Our marvellous stadiums and the friendly welcome that I hope foreign tourists will receive should be shown to their best advantage.

One of the things that struck me during the debate was the number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who pointed out how well the Sports Council had done in distributing lottery funds. We all know that a number of the distributing bodies have come in for fairly ferocious criticism, but the Sports Council has managed to tread an extremely difficult and delicate line extremely well. I should like to pay particular tribute to Mr. Rodney Walker, its chairman, and Mr. Derek Casey, who have done a marvellous job.

Mr. Pendry: And David Carpenter.

Mr. Sproat: Yes, indeed. It is a difficult task, and the Sports Council is doing it extremely well with the experience gained in just one year.

It is also worth noting that the Sports Council has shown flexibility. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) asked about the matching funds for lottery money. I do not pretend that we have solved that problem, but the Sports Council has shown that it is prepared to learn from experience. It has accepted that schools are probably less able than many other bodies to raise matching funds. In inner-city areas, it has upped the lottery's funding contribution to 90 per cent., and for all projects involving schools the lottery will provide 80 per cent. of the funding.

When our policy document, "Raising the Game", said that we wanted to improve links between schools and local clubs, the Sports Council immediately responded and said that it would find an extra £2 million—a challenge fund—so that schools and local clubs that got together to develop a project could go to the council to bid for the money. I pay a great tribute to the work of the Sports Council in that respect.

I began the debate by saying that I wanted to concentrate, first, on what the Government could do particularly about sport. I believe that sport in schools has declined far too much. I believe that sport is an absolutely

central part of education because of all the things that it can teach young people, girls and boys, which they cannot learn either at all or so well from other aspects of school life.

I seek to secure the agreement of the House that the one most important thing that the Government can do about sport is to ensure that every child in the country has access to good sports facilities. As I have said, we hope that the lottery will make that possible. Our children should have a proper chance in schools. There should be a pathway from schools to local sports clubs, to local centres of excellence and on to a British academy of sport, so that would-be champions or international players have their chance and no boy or girl is denied the great benefits that sport can bring, however good or otherwise they are, for their health, enjoyment—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Thursday 13th June, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon or at Ten o'clock, whichever is the earlier; and

(2) at the sitting on Wednesday 19th June—

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to sentencing policy not later than Seven o'clock or three hours after their commencement, whichever is the later; and

(ii) notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), put the Question on the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Northern Ireland Act 1974 (Interim Period Extension) Order 1996 not later than Ten o'clock.—[*Mr. Wells.*]

Health Care Funding (Hampshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am grateful to have had the opportunity to initiate the debate. For many months there has been growing evidence that in Hampshire, my home county, the concept of the national health service being free at the point of use is fast becoming a myth.

More and more people in Hampshire are finding that when they need health care they are faced with a stark choice: they can turn to the NHS and become hostages to fortune with extended waiting times, or they can resort to private health care. An added twist to the wheel of fortune, or misfortune, is introduced when account is taken of where someone happens to live in the county and whether he or she is registered with a fundholding general practitioner. As a result, the NHS has become a two-tier health system in Hampshire, with patients treated not on the basis of need but on whether funding happens to be available to meet their needs.

I intend to demonstrate that as a result of the failure of the Government's health policies and a failure to deliver those flawed policies, people in Hampshire are being denied access to basic health care, whether it is heart surgery or dentistry, care for those with mental disorder or care for those who need the services of a chiropodist. Care is being either postponed or withdrawn.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will not merely resort to boasting about the increase in NHS funding, welcome though that increase may be. He knows well that health care needs are increasing and that in the United Kingdom we provide less for health care as a percentage of our gross domestic product than many other developed nations.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the particular issues that are having an effect on health care in Hampshire, which I had the opportunity to discuss briefly with him some days ago.

My constituency is served currently by the North and Mid-Hampshire and the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authorities. In 1997, boundaries will change and Eastleigh will be entirely within the Southampton area. At present, however, Eastleigh is suffering from funding crises within both authorities. I shall explain. In Southampton, there has been a shortfall of £11 million in funding for hospital services. That is the difference between the cost of maintaining services at 1995-96 levels and what the health authorities and GPs can afford to purchase for the coming year.

Through savage savings, including sacking about 400 members of staff, much of the shortfall has been met, but the impact on patients is severe. Instead of waiting nine months for treatment, cardiac patients will have to wait a year. Those involved in non-urgent cases will have to wait 14 months. That is the stark reality behind the Minister's statement in reply to an earlier debate on Southampton hospital services, when he said that

"there may be some slippage in waiting times as the financial problems are resolved."—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 147.]

[Mr. David Chidgey]

There has certainly been some slippage. It is an appalling situation for a hospital trust that had more than matched the Government's patients charter by increasing efficiency and reducing waiting times. As Jane Ransome, the obstetrics and gynaecology clinical services manager, said:

"Everyone from the consultants to the cleaners have worked so hard to get waiting times down to six months. Now to have to let them go out again because of shortage of money is just soul destroying."

Recently, I took the opportunity to visit Southampton general hospital's cardiac unit and I was shown its ground-breaking work in heart surgery. The innovative techniques developed by the director and his team are breathtaking. They use microtechnology to replace open-heart surgery. Patients who would have stayed for more than a month are now released from hospital in only a few days. It is a remarkable achievement, but it seems that that team and all that it has done is to be a victim of its success.

The director of the unit told me that his major worry was whether it could attract enough purchasers to maintain the high level of expertise that it had created. Cuts in the hospital trust's funding can only add to that concern. As Mr. David Moss, the chief executive, has said:

"We are going to have to take out beds and theatre lists and it is a painful process for everyone".

Under the Government's policies, patients' suffering will be selective. As *The Southern Daily Echo*, the paper in my constituency, reported only last month:

"local fundholding GPs who get a budget to buy hospital treatment for their patients are not affected by the latest cash squeeze on services.

They will continue to have fast-track access to services in what has become a two-tier health care system for patients in Southampton."

As I have mentioned, Eastleigh is split between two health authorities. My constituents in the south are suffering increased waiting times in Southampton, while for those in the north, health care services are being cut across the board as the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority battles to meet its budget.

I have not always supported the authority, especially over its long-term care policy, but I support its claim that its problems stem from the fact that it has had to fill the gap left by the closure of Cambridge military hospital in Aldershot, with little, if any, extra funding. As a result, it is facing underfunding of £7 million a year, every year. The immediate effect has been savage cuts across a wide range of health care services, not just in Eastleigh, but throughout Hampshire.

Hundreds of people and practitioners have written to me, to other Members of Parliament in the region, to the community health council, to the health authorities and to Ministers. The community is alarmed, disgusted and, in many cases, desperate as the NHS crumbles before its eyes. The most vulnerable people, for whom health care can make the difference between a tolerable and a miserable quality of life, are bearing the brunt of the cuts.

Time does not permit me to spell out the litany of service cuts, but let me give the Minister some graphic examples. Community dental health services have been reduced by 25 per cent., which means that, in Andover, dental sessions will be reduced from 16 to 10 a week. Dental surgeons running Andover's dental health centre have written to me. They say:

"We are a practice with eight dentists providing NHS dental care for almost 20,000 people in Andover and the surrounding area. It is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with the huge influx of patients who wish to continue to be treated under the National Health Service. Patients of the practice are now having to wait four months for an appointment for routine treatment.

The Community Dental Service provide a necessary and very valuable service in the area, particularly for children, the elderly and the handicapped who are most in need of treatment.

Any cut in the CDS budget will result in fewer patients being treated and increased pressure on what are already inadequate levels of service."

That dental health centre is facing 25 per cent. cuts. In Eastleigh, we are to lose four of our 18 weekly dental sessions. In Winchester, sessions will be cut from 22 to 16 per week.

Staff at the orthodontic department of Winchester's hospital have also written to express their great concerns to me. Without going into great detail, the letter states that 99 per cent. of their patients are children aged eight to 17, that, because of their limited budget, they can treat only those with the most serious malocclusions, and that, if patients are not treated, later in life they will face prolonged surgical procedures and, in some cases, severe emotional problems, which would require far more costly treatments.

Such appliances are made and used only in specialist units under the supervision of a consultant orthodontist and his highly trained and dedicated team. The general dental practitioner would not be able to undertake that type of treatment due to lack of qualification, experience and time. The £160,000 to run that department is a small price to pay to enable around 1,000 patients each year to receive orthodontic treatment. Those are just two examples from the many letters that I have received from practitioners and patients.

Given that Eastleigh is faced with the loss of one quarter of its specialist dental services, the local health care trust can afford to recruit only a salaried dentist as a safety net for patients who are unable to find an NHS general dental practitioner. That is no substitute for specialist orthodontics and it forces trusts to ignore the plight of many thousands of my constituents without access to an NHS dentist. Some extra dentists have been provided, but the number is still woefully inadequate to meet the needs of people who cannot readily find an NHS dentist.

Another example is the 20 per cent. reduction in the family planning service, which means that the well woman and psychosexual clinics in Eastleigh will be discontinued. Dozens of women of all ages and clinical practitioners have written to me expressing their shock and distress. Dr. Angela Stewart, senior clinical medical officer, states:

"These cuts are directly against the Government's guidelines in 'The Health of the Nation' and in particular the quest for a reduction in teenage pregnancies. They also deny their right to choose where they go for such services."

Mrs. Marlene Wood, a family planning nurse for more than 30 years, lives in Hedge End and works at a clinic in Winchester county hospital. She wrote:

"Of particular concern is that one of 'The Health of the Nation' targets is specifically aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies. Youth advisory clinics are targeting this group of people. Where will they go when the clinics close?"

Those cuts are only part of the dismal picture for Hampshire residents. Eastleigh's GP consortium has for years carried the burden of a relatively low general

medical services allocation. The amount that it receives per patient from the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority is £375, compared with an average of £425 for the whole area. When patients transfer to the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority, they are underfunded compared with the Southampton average of £413. The Eastleigh GP consortium is a dedicated team that spares no effort in serving my constituents, but it is caught in a vice of underfunding from the two health authorities that will tighten each year that cuts continue. Dr. Tim Frank, the consortium's co-ordinator, told me:

"Eastleigh is underfunded because of the legacy of the burden of underfunding from North and Mid Hants being left with Southampton and South-West health commission."

Tensions are increasing as decisions to cut particular services are made at the expense of others.

A common theme runs through the stream of letters and telephone calls that I have received from constituents, patients and medical practitioners. There is deep dismay and anger because the enforced cuts in health care are decimating services that prevent health problems from escalating. Savage cuts to solve current financial problems will lead to serious ill health for many more people over time—storing up a legacy of a growing need for extensive and costly health care in the future. Even given the Government's discredited health care policy, there is no excuse for ignoring the lack of equity.

The Department's response to pleas for help has been at best crass and at worst insulting. The response to Southampton's £11 million shortfall was an announcement by the Secretary of State for Health that five more intensive care beds were to be provided for Hampshire children, which was a disgraceful distortion of the truth. Those five so-called new beds already exist. Southampton general hospital had, on its own initiative, decided to reorganise the beds into a dedicated children's unit. While Ministers scramble to take the credit, no extra money or facilities will be provided. Last year, Southampton had to refuse almost one in every three patients needing intensive care, cancelling major surgery for some patients at the last minute.

In response to the savage cuts in services in the Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare trust, the junior Health Minister—the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Malone)—is quoted as welcoming the fact that the programme included no elimination of patient services. However, well woman clinics and some chiropody services have been eliminated. As I said earlier, a whole range of patient services have been savagely cut.

I need make no apology for mentioning the junior Minister in his absence. I have lived in his constituency for more than 25 years and I am one of his constituents. I declare an interest in the Winchester hospital—two of my children were born there. One was critically ill, but was nursed with great skill and care through those early weeks and is now enjoying remarkably robust health and appetite for life.

Only last year, late on the night of Good Friday, my wife was admitted to Winchester hospital, critically ill. Again, as on a number of occasions over the years, the care and the skill of the staff at Winchester saw us through a health crisis to full recovery. I, like so many others in the area, have the highest regard for the dedication of the staff at Winchester hospital. I take strong exception to the cavalier and dismissive response to the cuts in its patient services.

When I opened the debate, I referred to what I believe to be the crux of the funding crisis—the impact of the closure of the Cambridge military hospital on the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority. Having brought the matter to the Minister's attention before the debate, I hope that he can respond positively. The Cambridge, in common with other military hospitals, provided a wide range of services to otherwise national health service patients. The area it served fell within both the South Thames health region and the South and South West health region, so it shared a burden with two regional health authorities—which, at the time, acted with a great deal more autonomy from the Department of Health than regional health authorities do today.

The unexpected speed of the closure of the Cambridge allowed the regional authorities little time to assess their new health care responsibilities. As a result, the South Thames region made provision for its additional responsibilities, but the South and South West region did not. With hindsight, that was clearly the wrong decision and it has left the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority with a continuing funding crisis. The powers exercised by the regional health authorities have now been taken over by the Department of Health. Therefore, it falls to the Minister and his Department to correct past mistakes.

The North and Mid-Hampshire health authority will have to find an additional £7 million a year to provide NHS treatment for patients previously cared for by the Cambridge. The authority has hardly any reserves to help cover this year's costs. It has brokered a £5 million loan from the Department to see it through this year. Much has been made in the press of the Minister's statement about a one-off £5 million grant recently allocated to the authority from the NHS emergency fund. In reality, it is merely the conversion of a loan into a one-off grant. The additional £5 million referred to by the Minister in his letter to the community health council in March is not new money at all; the only new money is the interest payments that will be saved which otherwise would be paid on the loan. To resolve that long-term funding crisis, it is essential that the one-off grant is translated into a £5 million uplift in the annual budget, year on year.

That one-off grant is no more than a sticking plaster over a gaping wound. As the community health council said in a response to the Minister only last week:

"The severity of the situation means there are no local solutions available. We are asking most urgently that you now address this unacceptable situation. We cannot emphasise enough how some of the most vulnerable members of the community are going to be adversely affected."

Can the Minister, in all conscience, ignore the depth of feeling—almost desperation—in that letter? Can he ignore the dismay expressed by medical practitioners throughout Hampshire's health care service? Can he ignore the distress felt by so many people in Eastleigh and across Hampshire, who have contacted me and other local Members of Parliament? In the interests of fairness and justice, surely he cannot.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am pleased that the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) has chosen to raise the important subject of health care funding. I am sure that he will agree that, too often, the House indulges in debates on health policy with little or no mention of how the services will be paid for.

[Mr. John Horam]

Such is the geographical location of Eastleigh that the hon. Gentleman has a constituency interest in all three Hampshire health authorities—which, no doubt, is why he called his Adjournment debate "healthcare funding in Hampshire."

In April, all three authorities received a real increase in their budgets, from a total, combined cash boost of more than £26 million. That was part of another £1.3 billion injection into patient care that was announced in the Budget, and it shows the extent to which the Government are honouring their commitment to increase the real resources going into health care across the country.

Dealing specifically with authorities that concern the hon. Member for Eastleigh, the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority received an extra £7.5 million, which is an increase of 4.3 per cent., or 1.27 per cent. in real terms. That authority is close to its target level. Equally, the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority had an increase of £10 million, which is an increase of 4.82 per cent. in cash terms, or 2.3 per cent. in real terms. Those are substantial increases in funding for the health authorities of concern to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh also referred, quite rightly, to the excellent work being done at the Southampton University Hospitals NHS trust. I fully agree with him that that work is exciting and forward looking. I can tell him that cardiac expansion at that trust—including extra ward and intensive therapy unit capacity—will be ready this autumn. A new patient management system—a £1 million, fully computerised patient records and appointment system—was opened there in March 1996.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh also referred to the excellent work being done about schoolgirl pregnancies in his area. Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority is spending an extra £180,000 over the next six years in a bid to cut schoolgirl pregnancies. The authority will open more family planning clinics for teenagers, which will offer contraceptive advice after school and on weekends, and increase the number of trained sex education advisers.

Mr. Chidgey: The specific point is that the clinics in my constituency of Eastleigh will close. The fact that there are extra resources in the city of Southampton will not help my constituents.

Mr. Horam: I think that there will in fact be a general increase in provision for the entire area. It remains to be seen exactly what happens in particular parts of the area. None the less, one cannot get away from the fact that a considerable effort is being made by the authority, which I think the hon. Gentleman should recognise.

Another development in Southampton is the new, £10 million hospital development for elderly people—the Southampton western hospital. Three new neurosurgical theatres at Southampton general hospital are due to open soon, at a cost of £6 million. All that is a huge investment in revenue and in capital terms in the area with which the hon. Member for Eastleigh is concerned.

As I said, and as the hon. Member for Eastleigh understands, he is served by several health authorities. At the top of the extra funds for health authorities this year is the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority, which is also of great concern to him. It has received a special allocation of £5 million, to smooth the adjustment process following the closure of the Cambridge military hospital, which we realised would have a knock-on effect on the area that he represents and on other parts of north and mid-Hampshire. That is why, over and above the increases that have come to that authority, there is the extra £5 million that the Secretary of State announced quite recently.

When Ministers considered how best this year's extra money for the NHS should be distributed, some key principles underpinned the process. The first was equity, which I stress to the hon. Member for Eastleigh. The formula that we use, which guides the allocation process, uses the best available and robust knowledge on health needs. It is being developed by York university and is generally considered to be as sophisticated an approach as one can get when considering real health need. Of course, any formula is capable of improvement and, indeed, work is under way to refine that process further. We can also interpret any formula flexibly. We want to look not only at what the formula says but at how we can guarantee continuity and stability.

Consistent significant growth in funding for the NHS means that we can gradually move all health authorities towards their target allocation. The hon. Gentleman quoted figures for per capita funding in Eastleigh. I recognise that the Hampshire authorities are a little behind their target allocation, but we hope that, by a process of levelling up over the next two or three years, all authorities will achieve their target level of allocation, which is based on a thorough understanding of the health needs of the people of the whole country.

Mr. Chidgey *rose—*

Mr. Horam: I cannot give way. The hon. Gentleman consumed two thirds of the available time, and I must complete my reply.

Although the Hampshire authorities are currently below target in the areas that are of concern to the hon. Gentleman, they are getting closer. That is something that we all wish to achieve sensibly and systematically. As I said, one of the areas with which he is concerned is only 0.26 per cent. below the target level as we have agreed it.

In addition to the extra £26 million for the three Hampshire health authorities, the capital spending and the funds for pregnancy advice services that I have mentioned, an extra £300 million is going into the health budget for the country as a whole as a result of the efficiency improvements that we hope to obtain from the system. All that is available and the hon. Gentleman's constituency will get an appropriate share of it.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, comparing last year with this year is complicated in his particular case by the substantial local changes to health authority boundaries which took place on 1 April. He would be the first to agree that it is complicated, but I have studied his local situation carefully and can reassure him and the people of Eastleigh that they are receiving the correct level of increased funding after having made the necessary adjustments for the boundary changes. However, we plan to monitor the situation carefully and our flexible approach to resource allocation will allow us to deal with problems in future years, should they arise.

Clearly, from a commonsense point of view, it is a complicated situation. As I said, Eastleigh is getting its correct share but if, in practice, things turn out differently from how we expect, we can review matters when the time comes. I give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance.

A problem arises not only from the change in Eastleigh's position but from the special situation of north and mid-Hampshire, which is partly the result of the closure of the Cambridge military hospital. We have recognised that by allocating an extra £5 million to the North and Mid-Hampshire health authority this year to help it to manage this period of change. This grant is a critical component of an agreed action plan to deal with specific local pressures. The action plan aims to produce long-term solutions and to ensure continued stability. The special grant is clearly a key element in that.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will not play fast and loose with the NHS. We never have, either nationally or locally, and we shall stick to the principles of equity, continuity and stability when making future funding decisions, as has been the case since 1979.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned chiropody specifically. He must accept that medical need will still be met in full measure. No one who has a medically diagnosed problem will be unable to get the chiropody service that he requires. There was a certain amount of self-referral which may be affected, but people in medical need will still get the service that they require.

I have seen the hon. Gentleman's press notices containing charges about underfunded health services in Hampshire. Those charges are clearly untrue in this context. It is ironic that he should have made such charges only two weeks before Hampshire's health service received £26 million from the Government. He should perhaps have waited to see the real situation before making his unfounded charges.

Decisions on how best to invest the money that taxpayers put into the NHS are not easy. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman's local health authorities and all those who provide patient care have been working closely together to ensure that local people receive the best possible care. Any politicians who claim that the NHS is underfunded should first say whether they would even match the Government's record of increased funding year on year.

The residents of Eastleigh can rest assured that the Government will continue to meet their commitments to ensure that a growing health service is matched by the growing funding that it needs—that is as true in Eastleigh as it is anywhere else.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 May 1996

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessel Decommissioning

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the fishing vessels St. Benedict, St. Jerome and St. Jasper were decommissioned; how much was paid by his Department for each; to what *(a)* company and *(b)* liquidator; and who owned the vessels at the time they were decommissioned. [29568]

Mr. Baldry: The fishing vessels (financial assistance) scheme 1983 provided for the payment of decommissioning grant in respect of vessels which were either scrapped, exported for fishing outside Community waters or assigned permanently to another use.

In the case of the St. Benedict, the St. Jerome and the St. Jasper, the applicant was Thomas Hamling and Co. Ltd. The St. Benedict was sold for the purpose of fishing outside Community waters. The St. Jerome and the St. Jasper were permanently assigned to other uses. Once the conditions had been met in respect of the three vessels, payment was made to Mr. W. F. Ratford, joint receiver of Thomas Hamling and Co. Ltd. The table sets out the other information required.

Vessels	*Amount* £	*Date of decommissioning*	*Owner at the time of decommissioning*
St. Benedict	581,504	17 February 1984	Thomas Hamling and Co. Ltd. (in receivership)
St. Jerome	515,280	2 October 1984[1]	Thomas Hamling and Co. Ltd. (in receivership)
St. Jasper	51,484	6 August 1984	Thomas Hamling and Co. Ltd. (in receivership)

[1] Vessel sold for alternative use on 2 October 1984, but not removed from the fishing vessel register until 19 November 1984. It is not now possible to determine the reasons for this discrepancy.

Sugar Beet

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is undertaking to find a means of sterilising soil in which sugar been has been grown, to avoid the necessity for its disposal in landfill. [29766]

Mr. Baldry: Maximising potential uses for soil such as landscaping is more likely to be cost effective than sterilisation.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he intends to take to relieve sugar beet growers of the landfill tax on soil. [29767]

Mr. Baldry: MAFF officials stand ready to explore with the sugar beet industry ways in which the volume of waste soil returned to farmland, and therefore not subject to the landfill tax, can be increased.

Beef and Suckler Cow Premiums

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the Council of Ministers for increases in payments under *(a)* the beef special premium scheme and *(b)* the suckler cow premium; and if he will make a statement. [30140]

Mr. Baldry: The 29 to 30 April Agriculture Council asked the Commission to suggest measures at this week's Agriculture Council to assist beef producers affected by recent market turbulence and seek guidance on how and where the additional support should be targeted. This may include proposals to supplement the 1995 suckler cow and beef special premiums. I am determined to explore all possible ways of assisting producers and will be pressing for the implementation of such measures as soon as possible.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has fixed the 1996–97 Meat Hygiene Service inspection charges; and if he will make a statement. [30458]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The industry was notified by the Meat Hygiene Service in a letter from the MHS chief executive dated 15 March, of proposed increases to inspection charges for 1996–97. Bearing in mind the current crisis in the abattoir industry however, I have decided to defer the application of increased rates until 1 August 1996. In the light of BSE developments, we will be reviewing the proposed charges over the next few months against the aim of achieving full cost recovery for the Meat Hygiene Service in 1996–97. Should any change to the already notified charges prove to be necessary to meet that aim, they will be subject to further notification in accordance with statutory requirements. In the interim, the current charges will continue to apply.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29430]

Mr. Boswell: No records are held centrally of how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20, and *(d)* 10 employees were used by the Department in each of the last five years. The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Beef Ban

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the legality of *(a)* the original Fischler ban on United Kingdom beef, *(b)* the ban by individual EU countries on United Kingdom beef and (c) the Commission ban on United Kingdom beef (i) within the EU and (ii) internationally indicating how, whether and when the

Government may seek to challenge any of the above; and under what circumstances and to whom compensation may be payable. [23997]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* The EU ban on the export of British beef is not justified on the basis of science as a measure necessary to protect public health, and it is totally disproportionate. We are pressing at every opportunity in the Council of Ministers for this ban on the export of British beef to be lifted. We are also intending to challenge the legality of the ban before the European Court of Justice.

Compensation is a matter to be pursued by the private parties affected either before the domestic courts or the European Court.

Sandeels

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to call for a precautionary total allowable catch for sandeels at the forthcoming meeting of EU Ministers in Bergen; and if he will make a statement. [29883]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* I called for the introduction of precautionary total allowable catches for sandeels at the last meeting of EU Fisheries Ministers on 22 April.

Industrial Fishing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the scale of industrial fishing in the North sea; and what is the Government's policy in respect of industrial fishing in sensitive areas. [29886]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* The fisheries scientists of the International Council for the Exploration of Sea advised last year that annual landings from the industrial fisheries of the North Sea increased to approximately 1.8 million tonnes in the early 1970s but have fluctuated around 1 million tonnes in recent years.

The UK applies a precautionary total allowable catch for sandeels in the Shetland territorial waters, taking account of the sensitivity of the area. The Government have also called for the introduction of TACs under the common fisheries policy for sandeels throughout the North sea, in the Skagerrak and west of Scotland. We have asked ICES to provide advice on the appropriate level of precautionary TACS and have urged that account be taken of the need to protect local aggregations of sandeels in sensitive areas by consideration of seasonal and localised catch regulations.

EU Ministers Meeting

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who will represent the United Kingdom at the meeting of EU Ministers scheduled for 10 June to discuss agriculture and fisheries; and what is the agenda of the meeting. [29887]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* I plan to represent the United Kingdom at the meeting of EU Fisheries Ministers on 10 June, along with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

The draft agenda of the Council currently includes multi-annual guidance programmes 1997–99, technical conservation measures, fisheries research, redfish quotas in the north-east and north-west Atlantic, the sprat fishery in the Skagerrak and Kattegat, preparations for a conference on Mediterranean fisheries and a communication from the Commission on small-scale coastal fishing. Other items are likely to be added.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on industrial fishing in the North sea; and what proposals his officials plan to present at the meeting in Bergen on 13 and 14 June on steps to address industrial fishing in sensitive areas. [29888]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* I have recently received representations from Greenpeace on industrial fishing in the North Sea.

The officials attending the Committee of North Sea Senior Officials in Bergen in June will report on the United Kingdom's initiatives on sandeels and my call for a greater collaborative research effort to increase understanding of the impact of industrial fishing on other species.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Unfilled Teacher Posts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many unfilled teacher posts there are currently in *(a)* the primary sector, *(b)* the secondary sector and *(c)* total, giving the numbers per subject in the secondary sector; and what are these figures as percentages of (i) the primary sector as a whole and (ii) secondary teachers grouped according to subject. [29636]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on teacher vacancies as at January 1995, the latest currently available, were published in press notice 110/95 on 24 May 1995. A copy has been placed in the Library. The figures were published as provisional but they have since been finalised without any amendments being necessary.

Provisional figures for January 1996 will be published in a press notice on 23 May 1996. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, how many and what percentage of teachers sought early retirement in each of the last five years in *(a)* the primary sector and *(b)* the secondary sector and *(c)* overall, broken down by the grounds on which early retirement was sought and given in total. [29635]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on teachers seeking early retirement is not collected centrally. The following table shows the latest information on members of the teachers' superannuation scheme obtaining early retirement.

Number of percentage of nursery, primary and secondary school teachers[1] obtaining early retirement. Retirements in each financial year

	Numbers[2]			Percentages[3]		
	Nursery and primary schools	*Secondary schools[4]*	*Total*	*Nursery and primary schools Per cent.*	*Secondary schools[4] Per cent.*	*Total Per cent.*
1990–91						
Efficiency	3,450	2,710	6,160	1.7	1.3	1.5
Redundancy	300	1,230	1,530	0.2	0.6	0.4
Ill health	2,360	1,550	3,900	1.2	0.7	1.0
Total	6,110	5,490	11,590	3.1	2.6	2.8
1991–92						
Efficiency	2,760	2,060	4,820	1.4	1.0	1.2
Redundancy	360	1,150	1,510	0.2	0.6	0.4
Ill health	2,120	1,460	3,580	1.1	0.7	0.9
Total	5,240	4,670	9,910	2.6	2.3	2.5
1992–93						
Efficiency	2,540	2,200	4,740	1.3	1.1	1.2
Redundancy	700	1,310	2,010	0.3	0.6	0.5
Ill health	2,080	1,560	3,650	1.0	0.8	0.9
Total	5,320	5,070	10,400	2.6	2.5	2.6
1993–94						
Efficiency	2,410	2,380	4,790	1.2	1.2	1.2
Redundancy	920	1,710	2,630	0.5	0.8	0.6
Ill health	2,280	2,000	4,290	1.1	1.0	1.1
Total	5,610	6,090	11,710	2.8	3.0	2.9
1994–95						
Efficiency	2,560	2,260	4,820	1.3	1.1	1.2
Redundancy	780	1,240	2,020	0.4	0.6	0.5
Ill health	2,630	2,110	4,740	1.3	1.0	1.2
Total	5,970	5,610	11,580	2.9	2.8	2.8

[1] Excludes peripatetic teachers, supply teachers and teachers providing nursery, primary or secondary education other than in school.
[2] Includes only members of the teachers' superannuation scheme some of whom were not working as teachers immediately prior to retirement.
[3] The numbers of early retirements from the TSS shown as a percentage of teachers in service in schools at 31 March, prior to each financial year. The number of teachers in service includes some who may not have been members of the teachers' superannuation scheme.
[4] Excludes sixth-form colleges throughout.

Class Sizes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in January of (i) 1980, (ii) 1991, (iii) 1992, (iv) 1994, (v) 1995 and (vi) 1996 were being taught in classes of (1) 30 and (2) 40 or more in each local education authority in England and in total. [29641]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is contained in a number of tables which have been placed in the Library.

Teacher Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of those enrolled on teacher training courses in each of the last five years failed to complete the course; and what estimate she has made of the cost of the training which they received. [29638]

Mr. Robin Squire: The only information centrally available is calculated from the difference between the numbers embarking on bachelor of education and postgraduate certificate of education courses and those successfully completing them four years or one year later. The numbers and percentages of entrants failing successfully to complete initial teacher training courses in the last five years for which such calculations can be made are as follows. The table includes those failing examinations as well as those dropping out voluntarily. We do not know how much of the course was completed in each case, and cannot therefore calculate the costs of training.

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991—92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
B Ed Non-completers[1]					
Number of Students	1,539	1,924	2,316	2,588	2,500
Percentage of intake	19 per cent.	22 per cent.	24 per cent.	24 per cent.	21 per cent.
PGCE Non-completers[1]					
Number of students	1,191	1,391	1,493	1,451	2,445
Percentage of intake	11 per cent.	12 per cent.	10 per cent.	9 per cent.	13 per cent.

[1] These figures include students who failed, as well as those who dropped out. The calculations are based on the assumption of all PGCE courses lasting one year, and all B Ed courses four years. Figures are for England and Wales.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the average pupil-teacher ratio *(a)* for each LEA and *(b)* for England (i) in the primary sector, (ii) in the secondary sector and (iii) overall as of January in each year since 1980. [29634]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is contained in a number of tables which will be placed in the Library.

Funding Agency for Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of running the Funding Agency for Schools in 1995–96, and what is the provisional cost for 1996–97. [29637]

Mr. Robin Squire: Grant for the agency's running costs was £11.5 million in 1995–96. Budget provision for 1996–97 is £12.5 million.

New Technology

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to increase the resources available to universities for investment in new technology for teaching. [29852]

Mr. Forth: Higher education institutions receive their funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England as a block grant. It is for institutions themselves to decide their priorities for investment.

The funding council is investing more than £16 million over three years in a programme of metropolitan area networks to improve institutions' access to the higher education and research broadband network SuperJANET. The higher education funding bodies are contributing around £33 million over four years to the UK teaching and learning technology programme which develops innovative approaches to teaching and learning using modern technology.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the guidance issued to local education authorities in respect of the proper use of exclusions; and what plans she has to update it. [29683]

Mr. Robin Squire: A copy of the Department's circular 10/94 on exclusions from school is already in the Library. That guidance will be updated as necessary in the light of policy developments, including possible legislation, which are presently under consideration.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what procedures are in place to monitor whether any school exclusion was used *(a)* as a last resort and *(b)* prior to a last resort; what action can be taken if the latter applies; and if she will make a statement; [29681]

(2) what action her Department can take if it finds a school exclusion is unjustified; and in how many cases in the last two years it has taken such action. [29682]

Mr. Robin Squire: Only the headteacher has the power to exclude a pupil from school. In all cases of exclusion, parents have the right to make representations to the school's governors and, in the case of local education authority maintained schools, to the LEA. In the case of a permanent exclusion which is confirmed, as applicable, by governors or the LEA, the parents may appeal to an independent appeal committee. The decision of such a committee, which must consider all relevant circumstances in each case, is final and binding. My right hon. Friend has no power to overturn its decision.

Secondary School Governors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met governors of state secondary schools in the Greater London area. [29720]

Mr., Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend and other Ministers frequently meet governors of secondary schools, including Greater London schools, in a variety of contexts.

School Spending, Wandsworth

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the spending, per child in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools, in the London borough of Wandsworth in 1995. [29723]

Mr. Robin Squire: Expenditure per pupil in Wandsworth in local education authority maintained *(a)* pre-primary/primary and *(b)* secondary schools was £2,268 and £3,053 respectively in 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the review of recent research on achievement by ethnic minority pupils commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education will be published. [29754]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Students (Study Abroad)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to increase the number of United Kingdom students studying abroad. [29822]

Mr. Forth: Information about the opportunities for studying in Europe have been published in the Department for Education and Employment booklet, "The European Choice", over the last the last three years. The UK is a keen participant in programmes run by the European Commission which promote student mobility. In particular, the Government is a strong supporter of the Socrates-ERASMUS programme which provides UK students with additional support to study for three to 12 months in another country within the European Economic Area.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29459]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information required could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department. The Department does not maintain this information in the form requested.

Modern Apprenticeship Programme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how she plans to ensure that more young black people participate in the modern apprenticeship programme; [29412]

(2) what percentage of places on the modern apprenticeship programme are currently held by young black people. [29414]

Mr. Paice: Young black people currently account for about 1 per cent. of starts in modern apprenticeships. The results of work to identify good practice in recruitment and selection have been made available and further guidance for employers will be available shortly. The Department is currently exploring with the Commission for Racial Equality and others how best to ensure these new opportunities are drawn to the attention of young black people.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by her Department in each of the last five years. [29444]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Warwick and Coventry Universities

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students were at *(a)* the university of Warwick and *(b)* Coventry university in each year since 1989, (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage change on the previous year. [29623]

Mr. Forth: The information is given in the following table:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*[1]
University of Warwick:						
Numbers	8,262	8,828	9,701	12,471	13,836	15,851
Percentage change	5	7	10	29	11	n/a
Coventry University:						
Numbers	8,484	10,158	12,233	12,550	16,086	14,646
Percentage change	3	20	20	3	28	n/a

n/a = not applicable

[1] Due to changes in data collection, 1994 figures are not directly comparable to those in earlier years. Percentage changes between 1993 and 1994 are therefore not calculated.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the undergraduate student to staff ratio in *(a)* the university of Warwick and *(b)* Coventry university for each year since 1989. [29624]

Mr. Forth: Information on student-staff ratios for the university of Warwick has been published by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals in its volume "Universities' Management Statistics and Performance Indicators". Similar data for Coventry university have been published by the Polytechnic and College Funding Council in its volume "Student Staff Ratios in Former Polytechnics and Colleges". Copies of these volumes giving data up to 1993–94 are held in the Library.

Mr. Cunnigham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the capital allocation to *(a)* the university of Warwick and *(b)* Coventry university in (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96; and what it will be in 1996–97 and 1997–98 in (1) cash terms, (2) real terms and (3) as a percentage change on the previous year. [29625]

Mr. Forth: The Higher Education Funding Council for England formula capital funds allocations for 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 are set out in the table, and the 1996–97 figure is given in cash terms, real terms at 1995–96 prices and as a percentage change on the previous year. For 1996–97, the council allocated a single block grant to institutions for recurrent and capital purposes; the figure shown is that element of the grant derived from the council's equipment and estates funding formula.

£000s

	University	
	Coventry	*Warwick*
1994–95 cash	2,246	2,667
1995–96 cash	2,575	2,962
Cash	1,725	2,225
1997–98 real terms	1,678	2,166
Percentage change	–35	–27

Figures for 1997–98 have not yet been decided.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of DFEE funding per undergraduate student at *(a)* at the university of Warwick and *(b)* Coventry university in each year since 1990; and what it will be in 1996–97 in (i) cash terms, (ii) real terms and (iii) as a percentage change on the previous year. [29626]

Mr. Forth: The information is not readily available for individual institutions.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been given by her Department to *(a)* the university of Warwick and *(b)* Coventry university in each year since 1990 for the construction of new buildings. [29627]

Mr. Forth: Since 1992, the university of Warwick and Coventry university have both received funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England towards the cost of specific capital projects. In both cases only a minority of the project cost has been funded by HEFCE. Details are as follows:

	Projects	*Total HEFCE funds approved* £	*Financial year in which awarded*
Coventry	Extension and refurbishment of 90–94 Gosford Street	1,750,000	1992–93
Warwick	Library extension	313,000	1995–96

Information for 1991 and earlier years is not readily available.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if her Department required bonds from businesses with under *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29418]

Mr. Robin Squire: Advice on the use of performance bonds is set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48, "Bonds and Guarantees", copies of which are available in the Library. This guidance makes it clear that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor.

Schools (Serious Measures)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the schools which have required serious measures under the provisions of the Education Act 1993 to be taken against them; in respect of each school, how long the serious measures have been in force; and into which schools the Education Association has been sent. [29965]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is given in the following table:

School [1]	*LEA area*	*Date special measures applied*	*Date special measures ceased*
Crook	Durham	December 1993	July 1995
Brookside	Derbyshire	December 1993	March 1995
Northicote	Wolverhampton	January 1994	May 1995
Stratford	GM (Newham)	February 1994	December 1995
Battersea Technology College	Wandsworth	February 1994	
The Drive	Gateshead	March 1994	
The Phoenix	Hammersmith and Fulham	April 1994	
Lilian Baylis	Lambeth	April 1994	
St. Richard of Chichester	Camden	June 1994	
Cross Green	Leeds	July 1994	
Dick Sheppard	Lambeth	August 1994	Closed July 1995
St. Mark's	Hammersmith and Fulham	August 1994	Closed July 1995
Fairfax	Bradford	August 1994	
Hackney Downs	Hackney	August 1994	Closed December 1995
Rough Hay	Walsall	November 1994	
Fryerns School	Essex	June 1995	
Brough	Cumbria	June 1995	
Little Ilford	Newham	June 1995	
Rearsby	Leicestershire	July 1995	
Gainsborough	Newham	July 1995	
Park Lane	Brent	July 1995	
Kingshurst	Solihull	July 1995	
St. Malachy's	Liverpool	July 1995	
Ingram High	Croydon	July 1995	
Malory	Lewisham	August 1995	
The Forest	Nottinghamshire	August 1995	
Earl Marshal	Sheffield	August 1995	
Holyhead	Sandwell	September 1995	
Woodstock	Leicestershire	September 1995	
Green Acres	Wolverhampton	September 1995	
Mostyn Gardens	Lambeth	September 1995	
Deeside	Cheshire	September 1995	
Edna G Olds	Nottinghamshire	September 1995	
Sts. Barnabus and Paul	Lancashire	September 1995	
Northways	Leeds	September 1995	
Christchurch	Wandsworth	September 1995	
Edinburgh	Waltham Forest	September 1995	
Brancaster CE	Norfolk	September 1995	
St. Joseph's RC Primary	Brent	September 1995	
Garston	Liverpool	September 1995	
Newport	Waltham Forest	September 1995	
Ashburton High	Croydon	October 1995	
Rodmell	East Sussex	November 1995	
St. James CE Primary	Cumbria	November 1995	
Staveley	Derbyshire	December 1995	
St. George's Primary	Wandsworth	December 1996	
Ashton St. Peter's	GM (Bedfordshire)	January 1996	
St. Patrick's RC Primary	Shropshire	January 1996	
The Sneyd	Staffordshire	December 1995	
St. Matthias	Hackney	December 1995	
Whitebridge	Leeds	December 1995	

School [1]	LEA area	Date special measures applied	Date special measures ceased
Victoria	Leeds	December 1995	
Bollin Cross	Manchester	January 1996	
Highview	Sutton	December 1995	
St. Mary of the Angels	Westminster	December 1995	
Munella Community College	Leicestershire	February 1995	
Isaac Newton	Hull	January 1996	
Foxearth	Essex	December 1995	
Lostock Park	Bolton	February 1996	
Brookfield	Gloucester	December 1995	
Dalton	Kirklees	January 1996	
Corby and Kettering Pupil Referral Unit	Northampton	January 1996	
St. Stephen's	Lambeth	November 1994	
St. John the Divine	Lambeth	November 1994	
Roundthorn	Oldham	November 1994	March 1996
Tamarside	Devon	December 1994	
Francis Askew	Hull	December 1994	February 1996
Norbridge	Nottinghamshire	December 1994	
Fred Nicholson	Norfolk	January 1995	
Earlsmead	Haringey	January 1995	
Abbey Farm	Norfolk	January 1995	
Hockwold	Norfolk	January 1995	
Morningside	Hackney	January 1995	
South Park Infants	Redbridge	January 1995	
Kilworthy House	Devon	February 1995	Closed June 1995
Welsh House Farm	Birmingham	February 1995	
Breeze Hill	Oldham	February 1995	
Urchfont	Wiltshire	February 1995	
Lea	Berkshire	February 1995	
Broomwood	Bradford	February 1995	
St. George's	Southwark	February 1995	
Northmoor Green	Somerset	February 1995	
Langham	Haringey	February 1995	
Geoffrey Chaucer	Southwark	February 1995	
Erpingham	Norfolk	March 1995	February 1996
All Saints	Rochdale	March 1995	
Pinewood	Staffordshire	March 1995	
St. Ann's	GM (Sheffield)	April 1995	
St. Joseph's Academy	Lewisham	January 1995	
South Benwell	Newcastle	April 1995	
Handsworth Wood Boys	Birmingham	April 1995	
Weavers Field	Tower Hamlets	April 1995	
Rams Episcopal	Hackney	April 1995	
William Penn	Southwark	April 1995	
Shaw Park	Hull	April 1995	
Mayville	Waltham Forest	April 1995	
UpOttery	Devon	May 1995	
Deerlands	Sheffield	May 1995	
Southfields	GM (Kent)	May 1995	
Mary Linwood	Leicestershire	May 1995	
St. Hugh's	GM (Lincolnshire)	May 1995	
Tyldesley Highfield	Wigan	May 1995	
West Gate Community	Newcastle	May 1995	
The Haig	Wiltshire	June 1995	
Waterfield	Greenwich	June 1995	
Upbury Manor	GM (Kent)	April 1995	
Brent Pupil Referral Unit	Brent	May 1995	
St. Joseph's Primary	Waltham Forest	May 1995	
Linwood	Dorset	June 1995	
St. Monica's	Hackney	January 1996	
St. Anselm's	Essex	February 1996	
Finmere	Oxfordshire	February 1996	
John Stainer	Lewisham	February 1996	
Ravenscroft	Somerset	February 1996	
Hickling	Norfolk	February 1996	
Southern Road	Newham	March 1996	
Summerseat	Bury	March 1996	
Lowry	Salford	February 1996	
Our Lady of Fatima	GM (Liverpool)	March 1996	
Kelsey Park	GM (Bromley)	March 1996	
Goddington	Bromley	March 1996	
St. Mary's CE Primary	Gloucestershire	March 1996	
John Busch	Hounslow	March 1996	
Brindale	Stockport	April 1996	
Lea Green	Waltham Forest	April 1996	
Millbrook Community	Hampshire	April 1996	
Roe Lee	Lancashire	April 1996	
Cawston	Norfolk	March 1996	
Beechwood	Berkshire	April 1996	
Jubilee Park	Sandwell	April 1996	
Watergate	Lewisham	March 1996	
Griffin Manor	Greenwich	April 1996	
St. Bernards RC	Bolton	March 1996	
Hillcrest	Leeds	April 1996	
Melbourne	Kent	April 1996	
Rowdown	Croydon	April 1996	
St. Margaret's	GM (Bedfordshire)	May 1996	
Slated Row	Buckinghamshire	April 1996	
Folkwood	Sheffield	April 1996	
Blakelaw	Newcastle	April 1996	
Westmoor	Kirklees	May 1996	
Rowdeford	Wiltshire	May 1996	

[1] Excludes schools where inspection report is not yet in the public domain.

One school, Hackney Downs, Hackney, was transferred on 1 September 1995 to the conduct of an education association, and subsequently closed. On 9 May 1966 the Secretary of State announced that she was minded to transfer Langham school, Haringey, to the conduct of an education association, subject to responses to consultation.

Engineers and Scientists

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 11 March *Official Report,* column *431,* how many professional engineers and technology officers of each category were employed at each grade in each of the Department of Education and Employment agencies in each year since 1991. [29826]

Mr. Robin Squire: The DFEE agencies employed one higher professional technology officer in the Employment Service in each year from 1 January 1991 to 1 January 1995. There are no practising professional engineers.

There may be professionally qualified engineers and technology officers working in mainstream grades. However, this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Company Grants

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what grants were given by her Department to company V, whose identity has been supplied to her, between 1989 and 1991; and which grants covered training in welding and lamination. [30035]

Mr. Robin Squire: My Department has paid no grants directly to company V between 1989 and 1991.

Departmental Employees (Unfair Treatment)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many cases of unfair treatment have been taken to industrial tribunals by employees of the Department of Employment in each year since 1988; and in how many of these the industrial tribunal found in favour of the employee. [28661]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* Prior to its break-up on 5 July 1995, the Department of Employment Group held no central records of the number of cases of alleged unfair treatment taken to industrial tribunals by employees. The best information available is as follows:

Year	*Number of cases taken*	*Number of cases found in employee's favour*
1988	4	1
1989	3	1
1990	5	2
1991	3	0
1992	8	0
1993	35	2
1994	53	0
1995	40	5

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from Sir Richard Scott on communications between the secretary to his inquiry into military exports to Iraq and his civil service superiors in the course of that inquiry; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement. [29501]

The Deputy Prime Minister: None.

One-stop Government Shop

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to introduce a one-stop Government shop; and if they require the introduction of a combined smartcard/ID card. [29695]

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are no present plans to introduce a one-stop Government shop beyond the networks of Government offices in the regions and the business links nation-wide. A prototype of a computerised business start-up system is being demonstrated at selected business links around the UK at present. No decisions have been made on its future.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29417]

Mr. Willetts: The Office of Public Service and its agencies, HMSO and the Central Office of Information, follow the Treasury's central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 on "Bonds and Guarantees" which states that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor. There have been no payments made by bond to the Department in any of the last five years.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29445]

Mr. Willetts: The information is not held in the form requested.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29460]

Mr. Willetts: The information is not held in the form requested.

Civil Service Pensions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the answer from the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *384*, what other groups of civil service pensions will not be *(a)* market tested and *(b)* privatised as regards their administration. [30160]

Mr. Willetts: The intention is to open up the administration of the principal civil service pension scheme and associated schemes to competition. Decisions on the timing of individual market tests will be for employing Departments and agencies to take.

Millennium Exhibition

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times the ministerial group to co-ordinate the Government's participation in the millennium exhibition has met; what were its conclusions; and if he will make a statement. [30052]

The Deputy Prime Minister: "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes it clear that information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet or Cabinet committees is not normally made public. The committee meets whenever necessary to oversee the Government's role in relation to the millennium festival and to take forward any necessary planning of the Government's involvement in this event.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans in respect of the United Kingdom derogations from Council of Europe recommendation No. R(87)15; and which other signatories to the convention have adopted the same derogations. [29692]

Mr. Kirkhope: The United Kingdom has reserved its right to comply or not with principles 2.2 and 2.4 of the Council of Europe recommendation. There are no plans to lift these reservations.

The Republic of Ireland entered a general reservation to comply or not with the recommendation as a whole and Switzerland abstained.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce secondary legislation to implement the data protection directive in the next Session of Parliament. [29700]

Mr. Sackville: We shall decide how to implement the data protection directive in the light of responses to the Government's consultation paper. This was issued on 22 March and responses have been invited by 19 July.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name each member of the Data Protection Tribunal and indicate the relevant professional qualification or experience which qualify him or her for appointment to the tribunal. [29698]

Mr. Sackville: A list of the current members of the Data Protection Tribunal, together with some brief biographical information, has been placed in the Library. The biographical information relates to the reason for appointment to the tribunal, and is not necessarily the current position of the person concerned.

Identity Cards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Data Protection Registrar in respect of the benefits and risks of ID cards. [29690]

Mr. Sackville: We have received the Data Protection Registrar's booklet "Identity Cards—Putting you in the Picture" and also her formal response to the Government's Green Paper on identity cards.

Prisoners (Life Sentences)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his timetable for informing all prisoners serving life sentences of the minimum sentence they will serve; and by when he expects that all such prisoners who have already served five years of their sentence will have been so informed. [28796]

Miss Widdecombe: Arrangements have been made, following the House of Lords judgment in Doody and others in June 1993, for newly sentenced murderers to be informed of their tariff within nine weeks of receipt of any representations they make to my right hon. and learned Friend about the tariff recommendations made by the judiciary. The judicial recommendations are disclosed to these prisoners as soon as possible after conviction.

A special exercise was completed in December 1994 to disclose previously undisclosed tariff information to some 2,400 convicted murderers still in prison in England and Wales. Representations have been received in about 390 of these cases and 127 have been reconsidered and tariffs set afresh. The rest will be reconsidered as quickly as possible, priority being given to those whose existing tariffs are nearest to expiry.

The disclosure exercise included about 80 prisoners for whom no exact tariff had been set but who were told that their tariffs would be at least 20 years. Subject to receipt of representations, we expect to complete the setting of tariffs in these cases within the next six months.

Coroners Court Service

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has had concerning the effectiveness of the coroners court service. [28800]

Mr. Sackville: Complaints about the conduct of coroners and suggestions concerning the inquest system are received from time to time from individuals and organisations.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what questions relating to the death of WPC Yvonne Fletcher were asked of people taken from the Libyan bureau to Sunningdale; and if he will make a statement on the answers received; [29292]

(2) pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 212, if the bullets from the spent cartridge case coincided with the bullet found in the body of WPC Fletcher; [29298]

(3) pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 212, how many shots were fired from the first floor window of the building. [29299]

Mr. Howard: The continuing investigation into the murder of WPC Fletcher is a matter for the police. The police could not give details which may form part of the evidence in future criminal proceedings without running the risk of prejudicing those proceedings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 214, at what angle was the body of WPC Fletcher at the time of shooting. [29293]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 8 May, *Official Report*, column 214, and to the pathologist's evidence which was put before a jury.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 213, what meetings or correspondence he has had with the parents of WPC Fletcher since the memorial service in Salisbury cathedral. [29294]

Mr. Howard: I have had no meetings or correspondence with the parents of WPC Fletcher.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 211, what report he has had from the Metropolitan police about why the video was not presented in evidence at the inquest. [29295]

Mr. Howard: The police are reviewing the contents of the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme of 10 April, including giving specific consideration to this question. I have not yet had a report of their conclusions.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 211, what factors led him to describe Professor Bernard Knight, Surgeon Hugh Thomas and Lieutenant-Colonel George Styles as so-called experts. [29301]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the explanation given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 8 May, *Official Report*, column 211.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 211, what factors have made it impossible to charge anyone with the murder of WPC Fletcher. [29300]

Mr. Howard: The investigation of crime is a matter for the police. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made clear to the House on 8 May, the police were unable to obtain enough evidence to sustain a prosecution without the full co-operation of those concerned in the Libyan people's bureau. Such co-operation was not forthcoming. None the less, the police were of the view that it was likely that the murder was committed by one of two people who were in the bureau. Both of them possessed diplomatic immunity and could not be prosecuted under English law even if the necessary evidence had been available.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 209, if he will put in the Library the exchange of reports between the Libyan people's bureau and Tripoli, indicating the date on which this information was passed to the police. [29291]

Mr. Howard: It is not Government policy to comment on matters which relate to operations carried out by the Security and Intelligence Services or to confirm or deny that such operations have been carried out.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29440]

Mr. Howard: The information required to answer this question is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with under *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29422]

Mr. Howard: My Department follows advice on the use of performance bonds which is set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48, "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Library. This guidance makes clear that bonds are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor.

My Department has not received any payments from performance bonds in the last five years.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29455]

Mr. Howard: Information for 1995–96 in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. A new accounting system, introduced from 1 April, should provide a means to answer such questions in the future.

European Year Against Racism

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding the European Commission's proposal for a Council decision designating 1997 as European Year Against Racism. [29943]

Mr. Kirkhope: The United Kingdom has expressed its support in principle for a European Year Against Racism. We are now discussing with other member states of the European Union how this can best be taken forward.

Ballot Papers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discretionary powers are available to those responsible for the local administration of *(a)* local government, *(b)* general and *(c)* European elections to (i) issue copies of appropriate ballot papers to

electors together with poll cards and (ii) arrange for the symbols of the main political parties to be displayed on ballot papers; and if he will make a statement. [29748]

Mr. Sackville: Under current electoral legislation

(i) there is nothing to prevent a returning officer from issuing a poll card together with a postal ballot paper for local, parliamentary or European parliamentary elections to an elector who is an absent voter and entitled to vote by post as proxy at the election; we understand, however, that because of different timing requirements this is not normal practice;

(ii) there are no discretionary powers available to returning officers to add party political symbols to the ballot paper.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *442*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991. [29837]

Mr. Howard: No professional scientists or engineers have been employed by the UK Passport Agency or the Fire Service College in the period in question. The numbers of staff in these categories in the Prison Service and the Forensic Science Service are set out in the following tables. Figures are not available in the form requested for 1991 and 1992, nor in the case of the Prison Service for 1993.

Forensic Science Service

Grade	*Discipline*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
3	Forensic science	1	1	1	1
5		2	2	2	0
6		3	7	7	7
7		60	—	—	—
Senior scientific officer		139	—	—	—
Higher scientific officer		154	—	—	—
Scientific officer		104	—	—	—
Assistant scientific officer		85	—	—	—
—	Senior forensic scientist	—	196	196	187
—	Forensic scientist	—	141	155	154
—	Assistant forensic scientist	—	206	177	269
Total	—	548	553	538	618

Prison service

Grade	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Engineer Grade 7	1	1	1
Engineer senior professional and technology officer	5	5	5
Engineer higher professional and technology officer	4	6	7
Engineer professional and technology officer	10	11	10
Engineer chemical SPTO	1	1	1
Engineer civil Grade 7	1	1	1
Engineer civil SPTO	3	3	3

Prison service

Grade	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Engineer civil HPTO	2	2	7
Engineer civil PTO	4	4	3
Engineer electrical PTO	0	0	1
Engineer electronic Grade 7	0	0	0
Engineer electronic SPTO	0	0	0
Engineer electronic HPTO	1	1	1
Engineer mechanical PTO	1	1	1
Engineer mechanical SPTO	2	2	2
Engineer mechanical HPTO	2	2	2
Engineer mechanical Grade 7	2	2	2
Engineer production Grade 7	1	1	1
Engineer production PTO	1	1	1
Telecommunications HPTO	1	1	1
Telecommunications PTO	0	0	0
Mechanical and electrical SPTO	1	1	1
Mechanical and electrical HPTO	0	1	1
Mechanical and electrical PTO	2	1	1
Pharmaceutical SPTO	25	26	32
Pharmaceutical PTO	1	1	1
Total	71	75	86

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the implications for the Lockerbie investigation of developments at the forensic science laboratory in Kent. [29972]

Mr. Howard: An independent scientific review is to be conducted by Professor Brian Caddy which will consider the instances where contamination might have taken place from the particular centrifuge in question. It would be quite wrong to attempt to pre-empt the results of that review by indulging in speculation concerning what those results might be. It is a matter of public record that residues of both RDX and PETN, which are components of a high performance plastic explosive, Semtex, were identified in debris from the Lockerbie disaster by the forensic explosive laboratory. I understand from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that the evidence which forms the basis of the charges against the two Libyans does not depend on the identification of the high performance plastic explosive which destroyed the aircraft at Lockerbie.

Prison Service (Performance)

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Prison Service will publish its plans for 1996 to 1999; and what key performance indicators will measure the service's performance in 1996–97. [30446]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service is today publishing its plan for 1996–99. The six strategic objectives of the period are:

(1) to achieve unit cost reductions of 10.2 per cent. and to contain capital spending by encouraging greater private sector involvement while maintaining the balance between security, control, purposeful regimes, and support for staff.

(2) To sustain a permanent step improvement in performance on escapes, building on what we achieved in 1995–96; in particular to complete the programme of work to enhance security for category A and high profile category B prisoners, and to achieve a significant reduction in escapes from escorts.

(3) To maintain control and a safe environment for staff and prisoners in the face of cost reductions and operational pressures; specifically, to carry through work on incentives, the drugs strategy and prevention of suicide.

(4) To maintain balanced regimes which support control and include affordable, effective activities to reduce risk of re-offending.

(5) To meet basic health care needs of the population, and to target particularly the transfer of mentally ill prisoners to hospital.

(6) To strengthen effectiveness of staff at all levels and specifically to increase the effectiveness of financial controls and systems.

The plan also sets performance targets for 1996–97.

With the agreement of colleagues in the Treasury and the Office of Public Service, as required by the Prison Service framework document, we have decided to make changes to the service's key performance indicators.

These changes aim to:

recognise that the service has achieved some of its key performance targets in full;

reflect the emerging priorities for the service in the coming years; and

take account of the recommendations made by Sir John Learmont on performance indicators.

For 1996–97, we have decided that the service should drop two of its existing key performance indicators.

These are:

KPI4 (access to sanitation): the service achieved its target of ensuring that all prisoners have 24-hour access to sanitation on 12 April 1996; and

KP 7 (access to minimum visits): all prisoners have had the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement for the last two years, so KPI7 has been fully achieved.

In their place, the service has three new KPIs covering:

the proportion of random drug tests that prove positive. This new indicator was recommended by Sir John Learmont and will measure the service's performance in achieving one of its key priorities, dealing with drug abuse in prisons;

the number of prisoners who complete programmes accredited as being likely to reduce the risk of re-offending. This new indicator will measure the service's performance in fulfilling one of its primary functions: preparing prisoners for release;

the number of days per year staff spend in training. This new indicator was recommended by Sir John Learmont. It will encourage the service to improve its performance on staff training, which in turn will lead to improvements in performance across the board.

We have also decided that the service's existing KPI on time unlocked should be amended. Currently, this measures the proportion of prisoners held in establishments that unlock all prisoners for at least 12 hours per weekday. The director general has advised me that some establishments have experienced problems, including drugs trafficking and intimidation of vulnerable prisoners, where prisoners are unlocked in the evenings without constructive activities being available to keep them occupied. We judge a lower threshold to be more appropriate, but with an increased target for purposeful activity. Therefore, from 1996–97, the KPI will measure the proportion of prisoners who are held in establishments that unlock all prisoners on standard or enhanced regimes for more than 10 hours per weekday. This will maintain pressure for improvement in those establishments unlocking only for eight or nine hours. There will be an increased target for purposeful activity of 26.5 hours per week for 1996–97, compared with 25.5 hours per week for 1995–96.

In addition, the plan will include additional performance information covering:

a breakdown of assaults showing separately those on staff and on prisoners and others;

the number and distribution of self-inflicted deaths

staff turnover and sickness rates; and

the rate of reduction in the headquarters overhead.

Taken together, these changes will give the Prison Service a challenging set of targets across the range of its activities while allowing it to focus on its top priorities of custody, control, tackling drug abuse and working to reduce re-offending.

The targets we have set for 1996–97 will require the service to improve performance against most of its indicators, including escapes, the rate of assaults, the rate of positive testing for drug misuse, the amount of purposeful activity for prisoners, investment in staff training and cost per prisoner place.

Ademola Onibiyo

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the representations received by his Department concerning Ademola Onibiyo in the seven days preceding his departure from Britain. [29480]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* In the seven days preceding Mr. Onibiyo's deportation on 4 May, representations were received from:

Bernie Grant MP

Bill Morris—Transport and General Workers Union

Lord Gifford QC—Councillor Adam Sandell, Oxford city council

John Monks TUC

Baroness Williams of Crosby

Harry Cohen MP

Fisher Meredith—Solicitors

Jeremy Corbyn MP

The President of Guyana

Jack Straw MP

Rodney Bickerstaff—UNISON (by telephone)
together with 65 letters from the general public.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost of *(a)* legal action, *(b)* administration and *(c)* holding in custody of Ademola Onibiyo since January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [29479]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* The total legal costs which fall to be met by the Home Office in connection with the deportation of Ademola Onibiyo amount to £21,000. Mr. Onibiyo was detained for two periods totalling 360 days prior to his deportation on 4 May. The average cost of detaining a person for this length of time is £39,225. The information requested concerning administration costs is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Abdul Onibiyo

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statements were issued by his Department on Wednesday 1 May to *(a)* the *Daily Mail*, *(b)* the *Daily Express* and *(c)* *The Guardian* concerning Abdul Onibiyo. [29481]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* Information confirming that Mr. Abdul Onibiyo was living safely in Nigeria was given to a number of newspapers which had previously expressed an interest in his whereabouts when that information became available on 30 April.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish *(a)* all correspondence between Her Majesty's Government and Nigeria and *(b)* all Interpol briefings the Metropolitan police have received on the whereabouts of Abdul Onibiyo. [29486]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* It is not our practice to publish correspondence with foreign or Commonwealth Governments about individual cases or the text of communications received from Interpol. However, I can confirm that on 30 April information was received from Interpol in Lagos that Mr. Onibiyo had been located in March this year living with his family in Ibadan and that at no time since his return to Nigeria had he been arrested or detained by the Nigerian authorities.

Nigeria (Missing Persons)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reference has been made to Interpol *(a)* by his office and *(b)* by British police forces concerning the whereabouts of missing persons in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [29487]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* No such references have been made by the Home Office.

Since January 1995, Interpol London has made one request to the Nigerian central bureau of Interpol to help trace a missing person believed to be in Nigeria. The request was made on behalf of a police force in the United Kingdom which had been contacted by concerned relatives.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29359]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* The readily available information suggests that Home Office Ministers or officials have attended some 68 meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about how he devolves his powers to suspend payment of any particular social security benefit as between civil servants in his Department and the Benefits Agency. [28640]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency forms part of the Department of Social Security and its staff are civil servants engaged in the implementation and administration of social security legislation. Decisions, including suspension of payment of benefit under the claims and payments regulations, are taken by civil servants in the Benefits Agency acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance indicators apply to the payment of housing benefit; and if these apply equally to the new unitary authorities. [28982]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department of Social Security does not set performance indicators for the payment of housing benefit but information from departmental statistical returns is used by local authorities to provide the base data for housing benefit performance measures compiled for and published under the citizens charter initiative by the Audit Commission. The most recent publication was for 1994–95.

The Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 provide that every authority shall make the first payment of any housing benefit awarded by it within 14 days of the receipt of a properly completed claim and all claims should be determined within 14 days of receipt of all the relevant information. Where this is impracticable, payments on account must be made. The regulations apply to all local authorities administering housing benefit.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what powers he has to intervene where a local authority is failing to pay housing benefit on time; and what procedures exit for a special audit of those local authorities who have a backlog in the payment of housing benefit. [28981]

Mr. Evans: The day-to-day administration of housing benefit is the statutory responsibility of local authorities and the quality of service is largely a local matter. The Department monitors administrative performance through the examination of statistical returns and other information backed by a programme of visits to a range of local authorities. Where a local authority appears to have serious administrative problems, departmental officials will consider making a special visit to discuss them at a senior level. In addition, a local authority housing benefit subsidy returns are subject to annual audit by an auditor approved by the Audit Commission which many, as part of this process, draw the Department's attention to authority failings.

Incapacity Benefit

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the former recipients of invalidity benefit who had been transferred on to incapacity benefit up to the end of February 1996 were *(a)* disqualified for failure to return the IB50 questionnaire, *(b)* disqualified for failure to attend a medical examination and *(c)* failed the all-work test. [29477]

Mr. Burt: The latest available information is in the table.

Former Invalidity Benefit recipients who transferred to Incapacity Benefit	*Total to 30 November 1995*
(a) disallowed following failure to return questionnaire	1,200
(b) disallowed following failure to attend a medical examination	260
(c) disallowed following application of the all work test	21,680

Source:
5 per cent sample from the Incapacity Benefit computer system. Excludes a small number of cases not held on the system.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many former recipients of invalidity benefit who had been transferred on to incapacity benefit had been reviewed up to the end of November 1995. [29476]

Mr. Burt: As at 30 November 1995, 165,000[1] former recipients of invalidity benefit who transferred to incapacity benefit had been reviewed under the new provisions for the assessment of incapacity for work introduced on 13 April 1995.
Note:
[1] Includes those reviewed under the all work test and those found to be exempt from the test.

Family Credit Payments

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the reductions in family credit payments following DSS action to recover child maintenance during the period 1988–89 to 1992–93. [29375]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29436]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29452]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

The Department's total expenditure on goods and services in 1994–95, the most recent year for which figures are available, was £1.47 billion[1].

Notes:
[1] Includes spend with both the private and public sectors—that is, Royal Mail, Post Office Counters etc, our records do not differentiate.
[2] Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

National Insurance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the value for money achieved to date by the national insurance records 2 system; and if he will make a statement. [29371]

Mr. Heald: When considering schemes under the private finance initiative it is a fundamental principle that overall best value for money in providing a service is assessed by taking into account all aspects of design, finance and operation as a unified whole. During the NIRS2 evaluation process, tenders from suppliers were compared with a fully costed in-house option to confirm that a PFI procurement represented value for money; and were compared with each other to establish the most economically advantageous option.

Under the NIRS2 contract, Andersen Consulting will receive no payment until the system is fully accepted and operational. Andersen Consulting has therefore incurred the development costs to date that would otherwise have fallen to the public sector.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he has taken to ensure that the delay in the delivery of the national insurance records 2 system will not be repeated in other private finance initiative projects undertaken by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [29372]

Mr. Heald: Variations to implementation timetables are not uncommon when procuring computer systems of the size and complexity of, for example, NIRS2. They can occur for a variety of reasons; and in both publicly and privately financed projects. Under private finance initiative principles, service providers are required to take the responsibility, and the risks, for the design, development and delivery phases of projects. The Department will continue to employ vigorous contract management and service monitoring on all of its PFI procurements to ensure that contractual obligations are met.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29426]

Mr. Burt: Our aim is to follow the advice on the use of performance bonds set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 in "Bonds and Guarantees". The decision to use a performance bond is made on a case-by-case basis, after considered judgment of any risks a specific contractor may present to a particular contract, regardless of the size of the contractor. We do not collect information of amounts paid by bond.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many asylum seekers receive reduced rate benefits under the urgent cases regulations at *(a)* the Euston district benefits office and *(b)* the Neasden district benefits office; [29749]

(2) how many income support claimants registered at *(a)* the Euston district benefits office and *(b)* the Neasden district benefits office are awaiting the outcome of asylum applications; [29750]

(3) how many income support claimants have been taken off the register as a result of the application of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 introduced on 5 February at *(a)* the Euston district benefits office and *(b)* the Neasden district benefits office; [29751]

(4) how many income support claimants awaiting the outcome of asylum appeals have been refused benefit by *(a)* the Euston district benefits office and *(b)* the Neasden district benefits office since 1 February 1996. [29977]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings Top-up Scheme

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publish detailed rules of the earnings top-up scheme. [30192]

Mr. Burt: I have today published, and placed in the Library, the printed version of the rules of the earnings top-up pilot scheme. The draft version of the rules was presented to the Social Security Advisory Committee and to Parliament in November last year.

The aim of earnings top-up is to help people without dependent children enter and remain in work. The three-year pilot, running in eight areas from October 1996, at a cost of £65 million, will test how effective it is in doing that. Couples could receive up to £56 a week on top of earnings and single people up to £28 a week.

I have also today placed in the Library a summary of the research programme for earnings top-up. This paper in the Department's research series explains how this important evaluation will be undertaken by three independent research institutes.

To help with the technical evaluation I have appointed a panel of experts to provide advice on the research programme. The members are:

Mr. David Stanton—director of analytical services division, DSS.

Professor Roger Jowell—director of social and community planning research.

Professor Stephen Nickell—director of the institute of economics and statistics, university of Oxford.

Mr. Andrew Dilnot—director of the institute for fiscal studies.

Mr. Paul Gregg—centre for economic performance, London school of economics.

Professor Jane Millar—school of social sciences, university of Bath.

Ms Jane Ritchie—director of qualitative research at social and community planning research.

Child Benefit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of children aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17, *(c)* 18 and *(d)* 19 years; and how many in each age group are in receipt of child benefit. [30137]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the table. Child benefit is not payable in respect of 19-year-olds; entitlement ends on the 19th birthday.

	16	*17*	*18*	*19*
Total number of children in age bands	637,200	627,300	656,900	686,200
Numbers receiving Child Benefit[1,2]	577,100	400,700	177,600	Nil

Notes:

[1] Figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample of the Child Benefit computer system.

[2] The figures quoted are provisional and do not include any late amendments or awards.

Pensions

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the annual savings in public spending which will result from the pension changes, with particular reference to the state earnings-related pension scheme, made by the Social Security Act 1986 in the years (i) 2000, (ii) 2005, (iii) 2010, (iv) 2015, (v) 2020 and (vi) 2025, and *(b)* the maximum annual saving from those changes. [30141]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is not available. Net savings in public expenditure cannot be estimated over the period; for example, we cannot predict the offsetting savings on income-related benefits this far in advance.

Estimates of expenditure on additional pension are given in the table.

The maximum annual saving in expenditure on additional pension from the changes made by the Social Security Act 1986 is estimated at over £35 billion in 2050. Estimates are not available for years after 2050.

£ billion 1994–5 prices (rounded to .1 billion)

Year	*2000–01*	*2005–06*	*2010–11*	*2015–16*	*2020–21*	*2025–26*	*2030–31*	*2040–41*	*2050–51*
Pre Social Security Act 1986 regime[1]	4.2	8.0	12.0	18.0	25.0	33.0	41.0	49.0	55.0
Pre Pensions Act 1995 regime[2]	4.2	6.7	9.2	11.8	14.5	16.6	18.7	19.5	19.3
Estimated savings	0	1.3	2.8	6.2	10.5	16.4	22.3	29.5	35.7

[1] Figures are approximations based on figures from the Social Security Bill 1986, report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Effects of the Bill on the National Insurance Fund (Cmnd 9711) allowing for an extra five million people contracted out in Appropriate Personal Pensions, and the report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Effects of the Pensions Bill 1994 on the National Insurance Fund (Cm 2714). They assume price uprating of benefits and are in respect of retirement pensioners only.

[2] The figures are taken from the report by the Government Actuary on the Financial effects of the Pensions Bill 1994 on the National Insurance Fund (Cm 2714), assume price uprating of benefits and are in respect of retirement pensioners only.

Social Security Benefits

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the actual figures for social security spending, excluding housing benefit, for each year since 1980. [30143]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Year	*Cost (£ million)*
1980–81	22,707
1981–82	27,316
1982–83	30,880
1983–84	34,364
1984–85	37,117
1985–86	40,311
1986–87	43,444
1987–88	45,609
1988–89	46,193
1989–90	48,800
1990–91	54,126
1991–92	62,947
1992–93	70,905
1993–94	76,923
1994–95	78,288
1995–96	81,669

Source:
Departmental reports 1980–81 to 1995–96.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families in receipt of family credit have children in receipt of child benefit. [30136]

Mr. Roger Evans: Almost all family credit recipients also receive child benefit. Nearly 95 per cent. of families declare receipt at the time of their claim but, as child benefit does not affect entitlement to family credit, it is not always declared.

Source:
Family credit computer system 5 per cent. sample of all awards.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security he will set out the actual figures for spending on housing benefit for each year since its introduction. [30142]

Mr. Evans: Information relating to the current housing benefit scheme is set out in the table:

Housing benefit expenditure—Great Britain

Year	*Out-turn (£ million)*
1988–89	3,773
1989–90	4,299
1990–91	5,147
1991–92	6,482
1992–93	7,901
1993–94	9,218
1994–95	10,181
1995–96	10,848[1]

Note:
[1] Estimated out-turn.
Source:
Social Security departmental reports.

TRANSPORT

Network Enhancement Projects

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate has been made of the likely accident reduction implications for each of the network enhancement projects announced in the Highways Agency's business plan for 1995–96. [29552]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 20 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what estimate has been made of the likely accident reduction implications for each of the network enhancement projects announced in the Highways Agency's Business Plan for 1995–96.

We estimate that our 1995/96 programme of network enhancement projects will result in a reduction of at least 500 casualties a year. All the individual projects in the programme will contribute to this but uncertainties associated with factors such as weather and road conditions make it unrealistic to give a precise estimate of their contribution.

Traffic Congestion

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the links on the national motorway and trunk road network where traffic in 1995 was at levels which resulted in regular congestion. [29553]

Mr. Watts: The parts of the trunk road and motorway network most subject to congestion due to heavy traffic flows in 1995 were in peri-urban areas, namely

the M25 and the M1, M3 and M4 approaches to London

the M6 and M42 around the west midlands conurbation

the M62/M63 around Manchester

the M62 approaches to Leeds and Bradford

In some cases, congestion was aggravated by roadworks necessary for improvement and maintenance works.

It is worth noting, however, that most of the trunk network was not subject to regular congestion in 1995.

Road Maintenance

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number and value of awards made against his Department or the Highways Agency in each of the last five years in *(a)* out-of-court settlements and *(b)* court judgments as a result of neglect of road maintenance. [29546]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 20 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what is the number and value of awards made against his Department or the Highways Agency in each of the last five years in (a) out-of-court settlements and (b) court judgments as a result of neglect of road maintenance.

The information is not available in the form requested, except at disproportionate cost.

Driving Instructors

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on policy regarding the reinstatement of driving instructors found guilty of sex offences; what is the present policy on such reinstatement; and what recent changes have been made. [29971]

Mr. Norris: Following a recent case, the matter was taken up by one of the national associations that represent approved driving instructors and by a local instructor.

Under part V of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the registrar of approved driving instructors has to be satisfied that an instructor is a "fit and proper person" to be an ADI. A conviction of the sort referred to would be viewed most seriously by the registrar, leading potentially to removal from the ADI register. He might well also decide that such a person could never again be a "fit and proper person". As a matter of administrative law, the registrar's discretion under the Act cannot be fettered so that he is committed to any specific course of action in every case and he cannot refuse to consider any fresh application on its merits.

There have been no recent changes in how these matters are dealt with.

Search and Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the interdepartmental group set up to review search and rescue helicopters has reported; and if he will make a statement. [30302]

Mr. Norris: The review group has submitted its report. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

The group was set up in July 1995 to examine the national requirement for search and rescue helicopters, and how this might most efficiently and effectively be met, as part of an integrated approach to search and rescue. It has made six recommendations, listed in chapter 6 of the report.

The Government have accepted recommendation 4, to set up a new joint advisory board for search and rescue helicopter provision. This board will consider further work on establishing a national database of emergency incidents and helicopter call-outs—recommendation 1—on monitoring helicopter availability—recommendation 3—and on examining the options for interdepartmental charging—recommendation 6.

Formal consultation on the report is being launched today with the UK Search and Rescue Committee and other interested parties. Views are particularly invited on the group's proposed additional coverage criteria—recommendation 2—and on ways to strengthen the co-ordination and consultation machinery for search and rescue generally—recommendation 5.

The Government are considering the best location for the two aircraft currently based on the south coast at Lee-on-Solent and at Portland. Our consideration will

have regard to the search and rescue requirements along the south coast and mid-channel. Views on these additional issues have also been sought.

Replies have been requested by Friday 28 June.

National Bus

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many buses were operated by each company within National Bus at the enactment of the Transport Act 1985. [30004]

Mr. Norris: This information is not available for the date on which the Transport Act 1985 received Royal Assent—30 October 1985—but the annual report of the National Bus Company for 1985 listed the number of vehicles of each operating subsidiary at the end of that year. The list is reproduced:

NBC bus and coach operating subsidiaries—1985

Name of subsidiary	*Traffic vehicles*
Ambassador Travel (Eastern Countries) Ltd.	52
Bristol Omnibus Company Ltd.	632
Cambus Ltd.	224
Cheltenham and Gloucester Omnibus Company Ltd.	216
The City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd.	142
Crosville Motor Services Ltd.	924
Cumberland Motor Services Ltd.	149
Devon General Ltd.	264
East Kent Road Car Company Ltd.	304
East Midland Motor Services Ltd.	258
East Yorkshire Motor Services Ltd.	176
Eastern Counties Omnibus Company Ltd.	273
The Eastern National Omnibus Company Ltd.	437
Hampshire Bus Company Ltd.	199
Hastings and District Transport Ltd.	69
Lincolnshire Road Car Company Ltd.	188
London Country Bus Services Ltd.	1,153
The Maidstone and District Motor Services Ltd.	325
Midland Fox Ltd.	296
Midland Red Coaches Ltd.	44
Midland Red (North) Ltd.	292
Midland Red (South) Ltd.	187
Midland Red (West) Ltd.	273
National Welsh Omnibus Services Ltd.	398
North Devon Ltd.	61
The Northern General Transport Company Ltd.	709
Pilgrim Coaches Ltd.	20
The Potteries Motor Traction Company Ltd.	240
Provincial Bus Company Ltd.	69
Ribble Motor Services Ltd.	836
Shamrock and Rambler Coaches Ltd.	37
South Midland Ltd.	91
Southdown Motor Services Ltd.	606
Southern National Ltd.	178
The Southern Vectis Omnibus Company Ltd.	161
The South Wales Transport Company Ltd.	261
The Thames Valley and Aldershopt Omnibus Company Ltd.	375
Trent Motor Traction Company Ltd.	378
United Automobile Services Ltd.	746
United Countries Omnibus Company Ltd.	522
Wessex National Ltd.	40
West Riding Automobile Company Ltd.	492
West Yorkshire Road Car Company Ltd.	356
Western National Ltd.	317
Wiltshire and Dorset Bus Company Ltd.	210
The Yorkshire Traction Company Ltd.	328

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29449]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Railtrack

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Government's sale of their shareholding in Railtrack group plc. [30483]

Sir George Young: I am pleased to report that the Government's UK public offer and international offers of Railtrack shares were successfully completed this morning when dealings in interim rights started on the London stock exchange.

As a result of bids received in the international offers, the price of the second instalment for all investors in the UK public order and the international offers were set at 190p per interim right.

Accordingly, the price for Railtrack interim rights purchased in the United Kingdom public offer was 380p per share, comprising 190p paid on successful application and 190p to be paid by 3 June 1997.

The price for interim rights purchased in the international offer of Railtrack shares was 390p per share, comprising 200p paid on successful application and 190p to be paid by 3 June 1997.

The Government offered for sale up to 434.8 million Railtrack shares in the UK public offer and the international offers.

Some 665,000 applications were received in the United Kingdom public offer for a total of some 391 million Railtrack shares. This represented some three times the shares initially expected to be sold in the UK public offer. In response to this demand, the Government increased the total number of shares allocated to the UK public offer to 210 million shares. At this level, the number of shares applied for in the UK public offer represented some 1.9 times the shares available.

Over 44 per cent. of applicants in the UK public offer received an allocation of shares. Over 97 per cent. of applicants had their applications met in full.

Some 180.4 million shares were allocated to bidders in the international offers. This number does not include any shares that SBC Warburg may have over-allotted in connection with the international offers. The extent of any such over-allotment will not be disclosed until later.

Individual investors bidding in the United Kingdom retail tender bid for some 136 million shares in Railtrack. Of these numbers, some 32.5 million shares were in respect of personal equity plan applications.

In addition to the shares sold in the UK public offer and the international offers, SBC Warburg, as global co-ordinators for the sale, hold an option to acquire from the Secretary of State for Transport up to a further 65.2 million Railtrack shares for the purposes of meeting any over-allotment made by them in connection with the international offer. This option must be exercised by 14 June.

Total gross proceeds from the UK public order and international offers are expected to amount to some £1.67 billion, of which some £849 million is expected to be received in this financial year.

Total gross proceeds may be further increased by a maximum of £254 million to the extent that, if at all, the global co-ordinator, SBC Warburg, exercises its option to acquire further shares.

The costs of the sale will be disclosed to Parliament in due course.

Following the offers, and assuming the exercise in full of the option over Railtrack shares granted by the Secretary of State for Transport to SBC Warburg Ltd., the Secretary of State for Transport expects to hold not more than 1 per cent. of Railtrack group plc's issued share capital. These amounts comprise principally shares that may be needed to meet share bonus entitlement under the UK public offer.

The demand for shares in Railtrack gives me great confidence in the future of the railways.

Heavy Vehicle Driving Standards

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many light goods vehicles and passenger carrying vehicles drivers have been disqualified in each of the last 10 years; [29543]

(2) how many LGV and PCV drivers have been required to take a driving retest for each year since the implementation of the north report. [29542]

Mr. Norris: Information about the number of LGV and PCV drivers who have been disqualified from driving during the last 10 years or ordered to re-sit a driving test since the implementation of the North report is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29434]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29427]

Mr. Norris: Advice on the use of performance bonds is set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses. The guidance, which my Department follows, makes it clear that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute of considered judgment about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources available to the contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor. Such bonds have been called for by my Department only twice in the past five years and in neither case was it necessary to call upon the bonds' protection.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *471*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991. [29836]

Mr. Norris: The information requested, as recorded in the Department's central personnel computer records, is as set out in the following tables:

Department of Transport central

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Professionals						
Grade 3	0	1	1	0	0	0
Grade 4	8	8	8	2	2	2
Grade 5	24	23	22	5	3	4
Grade 6	85	80	83	27	14	13
Grade 7	319	311	318	128	65	57
Senior professional and technology officer	429	432	451	137	58	55
Higher professional and technology officer	133	122	141	31	22	19
Professional and technology officer	62	83	82	8	3	1
Total	1,060	1,060	1,106	338	167	151

Department of Transport central

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Scientists						
Grade 3	1	1	1	1	0	0
Grade 4	0	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 5	1	3	2	1	0	0
Grade 6	2	2	3	2	4	3
Grade 7	12	11	11	9	6	6
Senior scientific officer	9	7	10	7	6	5
Higher scientific officer	1	5	7	6	7	5
Scientific officer	5	4	1	0	0	1
Assistant scientific officer	2	1	0	0	0	2
Total	33	35	36	27	24	23

1. The figures get progressively smaller due to agencies coming into being.

Highways

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Professionals						
Grade 3				0	2	2
Grade 4				6	6	4
Grade 5				14	16	13
Grade 6				44	51	46
Grade 7				174	196	152
Senior professional and technology officer				326	349	278
Higher professional and technology officer				120	116	106
Professional and technology officer				58	66	38
Total				742	802	639
Scientists						
Grade 3				0	0	0
Grade 4				0	0	0
Grade 5				0	0	0
Grade 6				0	1	1
Grade 7				0	1	0
Senior scientific officer				0	4	2
Higher scientific officer				0	0	0
Scientific officer				0	0	0
Assistant scientific officer				0	0	0
Total				0	6	3

1. Numbers for 1991, 1992 and 1993 will be include in DOT Central figures.

Marine safety agency

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Professionals						
Grade 3					0	0
Grade 4					0	0
Grade 5					3	3
Grade 6					11	9
Grade 7					50	48
Senior professional and technology officer					68	76
Higher professional and technology officer					9	15
Professional and technology officer					0	0
Total					141	151
Scientists						
Grade 3						
Grade 4						
Grade 5						

Marine safety agency

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Grade 6						
Grade 7						
Senior scientific officer						
Higher scientific officer						
Scientific officer						
Assistant scientific officer						
Total						

1. Numbers for 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 will be included in DOT Central figures.

Transport research laboratory

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Professionals						
Grade 3			0	0	0	0
Grade 4			0	0	0	0
Grade 5			0	0	1	0
Grade 6			1	1	0	0
Grade 7			5	4	2	0
Senior professional and technology officer			9	7	8	0
Higher professional and technology officer			9	8	6	0
Professional and technology officer			10	10	5	0
Total			34	30	22	0
Scientists						
Grade 3			0	0	0	0
Grade 4			1	1	1	0
Grade 5			5	5	4	0
Grade 6			19	16	16	0
Grade 7			73	69	63	0
Senior scientific officer			90	85	75	0
Higher scientific officer			70	79	82	0
Scientific officer			81	73	61	0
Assistant scientific officer			18	14	21	0
Total			357	342	323	0

1. Numbers for 1991 and 1992 will be included in DOT Central figures.
2. Numbers for 1996 are unavailable as the agency has now been privatised.

Vehicle certification agency

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Professionals						
Grade 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 5	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 6	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 7	3	3	3	4	4	4
Senior professional and technology officer	8	11	11	9	9	11
Higher professional and technology officer	23	19	19	24	27	27
Professional and technology officer	4	3	0	0	0	0
Total	40	38	35	39	42	44
Scientists						
Grade 3						
Grade 4						
Grade 5						
Grade 6						
Grade 7						
Senior scientific officer						

Vehicle certification agency

	1 April 1991	1 April 1992	1 April 1993	1 April 1994	1 April 1995	1 April 1996
Higher scientific officer						
Scientific officer						
Assistant scientific officer						
Total						

Vehicle Inspectorate

	1 April 1991	1 April 1992	1 April 1993	1 April 1994	1 April 1995	1 April 1996
Professionals						
Grade 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 4	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 5	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grade 6	5	3	2	2	1	1
Grade 7	16	14	13	11	8	7
Senior professional and technology officer	44	42	41	36	36	40
Higher professional and technology officer	104	103	101	91	81	63
Professional and technology officer	472	458	443	398	389	368
Total	643	622	602	540	517	481
Scientists						
Grade 3						
Grade 4						
Grade 5						
Grade 6						
Grade 7						
Senior scientific officer						
Higher scientific officer						
Scientific officer						
Assistant scientific officer						
Total						

ENVIRONMENT

Inhabited Bridge (London)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with *(a)* developers and *(b)* other interested parties concerning proposals to build an inhabited bridge across the Thames in central London. [28710]

Mr. Gummer: As Minister for London, I have had numerous discussions about the idea that an inhabited bridge across the Thames could once again be built in London.

It is the Government's policy to encourage ideas which can help bring new life and activity back to the River Thames corridor, an aspiration which is clearly very widely shared.

The idea of a new inhabited bridge in London deserves wide consideration. I have therefore particularly welcomed the initiative by the Royal Academy to stage a major public exhibition in September which will explore the long European tradition of inhabited bridges. I have also welcomed its announcement of an architectural ideas competition, the results of which will form apart of the exhibition, and have agreed to be a member of its judging panel for this competition. It is to be hoped that the Royal Academy's exhibition and competition will enable the possibilities to be more thoroughly aired and debated among Londoners and all those with an interest in the future of London.

In view of my involvement in the matter, I will take no part in any decision, relating to an inhabited bridge, which may subsequently need to be taken in the name of the Secretary of State for the Environment. Any such decision will be taken by my right hon. friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Conservation.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29419]

Sir Paul Beresford: This Department does not have a formal policy on the use of performance bonds but takes direction from published guidance notes issued by HM Treasury, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses. Each major project is judged on

its merits, including whether or not the use of performance bonds would be appropriate. The decision to include the requirement for a performance bond will be made independent of the size of the contractors concerned. There have been no cases of performance bonds being enforced by this Department in the last five years.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29458]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29443]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Essex County Council

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to synchronise the elections of Essex county council with those of the vesting day of the two new continuing unitary authorities of Southend and Essex. [29858]

Sir Paul Beresford: It is our policy to require fresh elections for each continuing unitary authority in the year before reorganisation, to ensure that planning and implementation of unitary functions is done on the basis of a fresh mandate. For reorganisations, including Southend and Thurrock, being planned for 1998, this will entail elections in May 1997, which will take place on the same day as the county council elections for the rest of Essex.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has to extend the life of the existing Essex county council to 1 April 1998. [29856]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has no such general powers.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if county councillors can be elected from *(a)* Southend and *(b)* Thurrock, to Essex county council at the election scheduled for May 1997. [29857]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has recently consulted on a draft order under the Local Government Act 1992 which would convert the existing Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock borough councils into unitary authorities. The order would, among other things, suspend Essex county council elections for county divisions in the areas of Thurrock and Southend which would otherwise take place in May 1997. Instead, the terms of office of the existing councillors would be extended until 1 April 1998, when the two districts would become unitary. We are currently considering representations on the draft order.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29354]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* Since January 1995, officials from my Department have attended 25 meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe. These meetings covered various aspects of the Department's responsibilities.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *422*, if the information he provided includes professional scientists and engineers working in Department of Environment agencies; and how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed in each grade in each of the agencies from 1991 to the current year. [29918]

Sir Paul Beresford: The previous question referred to staff in the headquarters division of the Department and therefore did not cover the agencies; this information is provided in the following tables:

Building research establishment

	1991		*1992*		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
Grade	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*
Grade 3	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Grade 4	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
Grade 5	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	4	1	4	0
Grade	20	3	21	2	20	2	21	3	21	3	19	5
Grade 7	71	10	74	12	75	11	75	12	78	12	76	11
SEO and equivalent	89	16	99	17	93	19	91	20	89	22	103	22
HEO and equivalent	89	13	92	15	91	17	78	17	73	16	71	17
EO and equivalent	46	15	49	13	48	11	52	14	43	12	30	9
AO and equivalent	21	0	18	0	13	0	12	0	10	0	7	0
AA and equivalent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre

Grade	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Science	Engineers	Science	Engineers	Science	Engineers	Science	Engineers	Science	Engineers
Grade 7	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
HEO and equivalent	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1

The buying agency

Grade	1992		1993		1994		1995	
	Scientists	Engineers	Scientists	Engineers	Scientists	Engineers	Scientists	Engineers
Grade 7	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
HEO and equivalent	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	3

The security facilities executive

Grade	1994		1995	
	Scientists	Engineers	Scientists	Engineers
Grade 6	0	1	0	1
Grade 7	0	2	0	2
SEO and equivalent	1	7	1	8
HEO and equivalent	1	4	1	4
EO and equivalent	0	16	0	16
AO and equivalent	0	2	0	2
AA and equivalent	0	0	0	0

East Yorkshire Council

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average amount of standard spending assessment per person in East Yorkshire unitary council in 1996–97. [29827]

Sir Paul Beresford: The standard spending assessment per person in 1996–97 for the east riding of Yorkshire council is £668.03.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his decision on the final caps for the two local authorities which challenged their cap; and if he will make a statement. [30445]

Mr. Gummer: I have laid before the House a draft order, under section 57 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, setting out our decisions on the final caps for Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire county councils.

We have considered very carefully all the available relevant information, including the case made by the authorities in support of a higher cap, before taking our decisions. We have decided to confirm the caps proposed for both authorities.

The caps are, in our view, reasonable, appropriate and achievable in all the circumstances of the authorities concerned. These decisions will reduce public expenditure, and the burden on council taxpayers in the areas concerned, by £13 million in 1996–97. This will result in a council tax reduction, at band D of £25.26 in Cambridgeshire and £34.89 in Oxfordshire.

However, I have concluded that Oxfordshire has certain pressures on its budget which may lead to problems in the short term. I have therefore invited Oxfordshire to consider making an application for a chaptalisation direction and supplementary credit approval. This would enable Oxfordshire to capitalise certain costs, thereby releasing resources to support is revenue expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Financial Assistance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *363*, (1) if his Department is looking at ways of making the declaration of interest of Members of his Department's regional industrial development boards and external advisers more transparent to the public; what further measures his Department is proposing to take in this area; and if he will make a statement; [28301]

(2) if he will place the register of personal financial interests of members of his Department's regional industrial development boards and external advisers in the Library. [28300]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answers 7 May 1996]*: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 15 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *494*.

Coal Mining (Wages)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the average earnings in 1995 of *(a)* faceworkers, *(b)* other underground workers and *(c)* surface workers in the deep-mined coal sector. [29611]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not available for the specific occupations requested. Information regarding the mining industry as a whole and broader occupational groups can be found in the new earnings survey, part A, a copy of which is available in the House Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Galloway: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list the cost to public funds of *(a)* each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in financial year 1995–96 and *(b)* each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in each year since 1992. [29509]

Mr. Beith: The House of Commons Commission is not in a position to provide details of the total cost to public funds of meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee, but the cost to parliamentary funds of individual meetings in Scotland for the financial year 1995–96 are set out in the table. They have been produced by a manual/clerical check as the information is not readily available in the format requested.

Location	*Date*	*House direct costs*
Aberdeen	23 October 1995	2,685
Edinburgh	11 December 1995	8,023
Glasgow	18 December 1995	4,841
Edinburgh	15 January 1996	11,005
Stirling	29 January 1996	8,056
Inverness	5 February 1996	7,457
Aberdeen	19 February 1996	6,852
Kilmarnock	4 March 1996	4,421
Glasgow	15 March 1996	500

These will not be the final costs for meetings in 1995–96 as there are still invoices and claims outstanding. Excluded from these figures are staff overtime and Members' travel.

It is not possible to provide details of costs for each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee since 1992. This can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

Average Incomes

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average earned income in the most recent year for which information is available of *(a)* the 5 per centile and *(b)* the 95 per centile of taxpayers. [29227]

Mr. Jack: Based on the estimated distribution of earned income for income taxpayers in 1996–97, the 5th percentile is about £4,150 and the 95th percentile is about £35,000.

Child Tax Allowances and Benefits

Sir David Knox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures setting out the treatment for tax and benefit purposes of children aged 16 to 18 years and still in full-time education, in each of the member states of the EU, showing in each case the amounts allowable in *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* child tax allowances and *(c)* educational maintenance allowances in (i) national currencies, (ii) euros and (iii) as percentages of average production worker earnings. [29583]

Mr. Jack: Available figures for child benefit and child tax allowance are given in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "The Tax/Benefit position of Production Workers" which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29428]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has had no reason to use performance bonds in the last five years. The policy for such bonds is covered by the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and Guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

European Loan Insurance Schemes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the European loan guarantee scheme to begin in the United Kingdom; what will be the maximum size of loans; which companies will qualify; who will pay the premium for the guaranteed support; and if companies who receive loan guarantees under the small firms loan guarantee scheme will be eligible to apply. [29411]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Commission recently published a proposal for a European loan insurance scheme for employment—ELISE. Detailed discussions with member states on its working have not yet begun and there are a number of issues to be resolved before the Council of Ministers can consider whether or not to adopt the proposal. It is therefore not possible to give information about a possible start date in the United Kingdom. The maximum size of loans covered is not mentioned in the proposal.

As proposed, ELISE would cover 50 per cent. of loans from private sector institutions, or up to 75 per cent. where the loan is transnational. Small and medium enterprises with plans to create permanent jobs with the help of loans from private sector institutions would be eligible to apply for the guarantee. It is anticipated that the scheme would focus particularly on SMEs with fewer than 50 employees. More detailed eligibility criteria are set out in Commission recommendation C (96) 261 final. Under the terms of the proposal, the premium for the guarantee would be met from the Community budget.

If the scheme were to be adopted, the Government would consider whether firms who had received loan guarantees under the small firms loan guarantees scheme would be eligible to apply for further assistance under ELISE.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the outcome of discussions between his Department and the European Commission regarding the European loan insurance scheme for employment. [29413]

Mrs. Knight: The proposal has only just been published. Therefore, as yet there has been no discussions either with individual member states, in a Council working group, nor with the Commission.

Salisbury Tax and VAT Offices

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who owns the freehold of the Salisbury tax office. [29922]

Mr. Jack: The freehold of Alexandra house, which accommodates Salisbury tax office, is owned by the Crown and is on the estate of the Court Service, western circuit.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed in the VAT sub-office in Salisbury; and what is the total floor area of the premises. [29917]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Currently, there are eight people working in Salisbury VAT sub-office. The total floor area of the premises is 156.9 sq m.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the location of, and number of people employed by, the Inland Revenue in respect of Salisbury taxpayers, in *(a)* hard collection, *(b)* soft collection and *(c)* the compliance section. [29919]

Mr. Jack: Details of staff employed by the Inland Revenue on compliance and collection work in respect of taxpayers dealt with by the Salisbury tax office are as follows:

(a) Hard collection—where some action required to collect tax in addition to the issue of demand notes—8 people employed at Swindon collection office

(b) Soft collection—tax paid following issue of demand notes—2–3 people employed at Accounts Office in Shipley

(c) Compliance—8 people employed in Salisbury tax office; 2 people employed in Swindon collection office

National Savings

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce the minimum deposit sum for national savings investment accounts to encourage savings; and if he will make a statement. [29878]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 May 1996]*: None. The minimum deposit was increased to £20 in February 1993. National savings has an important role in encouraging savings, and has a wide range of schemes to promote this, but its costs are borne by the taxpayer and large numbers of very low value transactions are administratively costly.

DEFENCE

Exports (Crown Status)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of defence exports having Crown status in each of the last 10 years. [29870]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Army Legal Aid Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used to determine eligibility for the Army legal aid scheme. [29759]

Mr. Soames: The general principles to be followed in deciding whether the case justifies the provision of legal aid are that:

(a) Legal aid would have been provided if the case had been brought in the criminal courts of the United Kingdom. This principle is designed to ensure that Army personnel are not placed at a disadvantage because they are posted aborad.

(b) The accused is being brought to trial by court martial for a service offence which is serious or involves points of legal difficulty, or the expert examination of witnesses is required.

Infra-red Technology

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column *511*, how much his Department has spent in the last 10 years on the development of infra-red technology. [29818]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested.

Polaris

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what temperature the Polaris missile propellant is burned when it is disposed of; and what containment measures are taken to prevent leakage of unburnt propellant. [29872]

Mr. Soames: Polaris rocket motors contain solid propellant. Disposal is achieved by using explosive charges which cut open the casing and then ignite the propellant. No record is held of the temperatures reached on burning, but a debris check of the disposal site is carefully carried out to ensure that the motors and propellant have been totally destroyed.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29416]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department's policy is that any request for a bond should be based on a judgment of the capabilities and financial resources of the bidder to fulfil the requirements of a particular contract. It is not related to the size of the company concerned. Such a bond would be called upon only in the event that the contractor defaulted or failed to perform against the contract in question.

A central record of parent company and bank indemnities and guarantees provided to cover contracts is held, but details of the values required and those relating to businesses under the three categories could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Western European Union

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the availability of NATO intelligence information to the Western European Union. [29893]

Mr. Soames: The recent conclusion of a security agreement between NATO and the WEU will improve the exchange of classified information, including intelligence, between the two organisations.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the establishment of a Western European Union political and military situation centre. [29892]

Mr. Soames: At their meeting in Lisbon in May 1995, WEU Ministers approved a decision to provide WEU with new decision-making mechanisms and structures, including the establishment of a situation centre to monitor and report on developing crises and act as a communication channel during operations. The UK's current Presidency of WEU has ensured that the situation centre will be operational by the second phase of Exercise WEU Crisex 95-96 in June this year.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning the Western European Union's use of NATO military assets. [29894]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the NATO summit declaration of 1994, our policy is that collective assets of the alliance should be available, on the basis of consultation in the North Atlantic Council, for operations that may be conducted by the WEU. This will include the possibility of making available combined joint task force headquarters.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the measures adopted by his Department to enhance the operational capabilities of the Western European Union. [29891]

Mr. Soames: Details of the defence initiatives undertaken during the UK Presidency of WEU, which runs from 1 January to 30 June 1996, can be found in chapter 1 of the 1996 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. As well as securing agreement to our proposals on WEU exercises and strategic mobility, we have offered sea training facilities to other WEU nations and have given impetus to the work to set up a situation centre. We have worked, and will continue to work, to improve links between WEU and NATO. As Presidency, we were instrumental in arranging for the signature on 6 May of the NATO—WEU security agreement, clearing the way for the exchange of classified information between two organisations.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list Western European Union joint exercises planned for the next five years. [29895]

Mr. Soames: Exercise WEU Crisex 95-96 is the only WEU-led exercise currently planned. Phases 2 and 3 of this exercise, which take place in June and December 1996, will test operational procedures for a WEU humanitarian mission. WEU nations have also invited the organisation to participate in a number of nationally led exercises. At the WEU Council of Ministers in Birmingham on 7 May, Ministers agreed the establishment of an exercise planning conference which will set out a future programme of WEU exercises. We expect that the first conference will be held this year.

Sea King Helicopters

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of Sea King helicopters in the possession of the Royal Navy; how many of them have been identified as having cracks in the lift frame; what is the average cost of repairing such cracks; and how many Sea Kings are currently unserviceable as a result of lift frame or other cracks. [29920]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Navy owns 119 Sea King helicopters and the RAF owns a further 25. Over the life of the combined fleets, 170 lift frames have cracked. The average cost of a repair is £58,000. Eight RN Sea Kings and one RAF Sea King are currently unserviceable for lift frame or similar cracks.

Equipment Procurement

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the value of equipment procured from single prime contractors has been directed supply in the last five years; and which United Kingdom technologies have been protected and enhanced as a result. [29863]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information of this nature is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on directed supply of systems and sub-systems when equipment is procured from a single prime contractor. [29862]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department's policy is that, wherever possible, requirement specifications are written in such a way that prime contractors are given the freedom to nominate and select the sub-contractors of their choice. There will, however, from time to time, be situations where suitable equipment is available only from a single source. Obviously, in this case, only that supplier will be able to meet the requirement but the prime contractor will still be responsible for managing the sub-contract.

Combined Joint Task Force

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency planning he has carried out concerning Britain's participation in NATO's combined joint task force initiative. [29890]

Mr. Soames: The UK has participated fully in the development of the combined joint task force concept since it was announced at the January 1994 NATO summit. The concept will provide NATO with a capability to form deployable headquarters, from within existing fixed headquarters, to provide the command and control of multinational and multi-service forces deployed on contingency operations. We expect to play a full part in implementation of the concept, through our participation in NATO headquarters affected by the initiative.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action *(a)* has been taken and *(b)* will be taken to recover the nuclear weapons on board HMS Sheffield in the south Atlantic; what assessment has been made of the environmental risks arising from nuclear materials on board; and what action (i) has been taken and (ii) will be taken to reduce the risk to the marine environment. [29743]

Mr. Soames: There has been no action to recover any weapons from HMS Sheffield, either between when she was hit and sank or since. There is no risk to the marine environment in the area where she sunk.

Contractors

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring is undertaken of post-programme completions to ensure that non-United Kingdom contractors have achieved the offset work promised. [29859]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Companies with offset obligations are required to submit reports to my Department every six months, detailing relevant contracts awarded to UK defence industry during the reporting period. A full audit of these reports is conducted in order to establish the validity of the claims, and to ensure that the companies are complying with the terms and conditions of their offset commitment.

Research Investment

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his procurement policy in respect of equipment which has been developed as a result of Government research investment. [29861]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As described in pages 68–71 of the current "Statement on the Defence Estimates", my Department's procurement policy on research investment is to obtain best value for money, encourage technological innovation and reduce equipment procurement risk. The extent of Government research investment in a particular piece of equipment is one of the many factors taken into consideration when procurement decisions are made, as are the potential benefits of defence research spin-off to the private sector.

Works of Art

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report,* column 22, if he will list the 107 works of art belonging to his Department which are classified as missing, indicating their individual estimated value. [29829]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It has not been my Department's practice to obtain valuations for our works of art, but most of the missing items are prints and photographs which we believe are of little value. I will place a list of missing works of art belonging to my Department in the Library of the House.

Acoustic Processing

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of Government funds have been invested in the research and development of United Kingdom acoustic processing capabilities for the last 10 years. [29860]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Details of expenditure on development of defence capabilities are not available in the form requested. However, estimates of research expenditure on underwater acoustic processing for the period in question, at 1996 prices, are:

1986–87: 9.6
1987–88: 9.4
1988–89: 9.2
1989–90: 9.0
1990–91: 8.8
1991–92: 8.6
1992–93: 8.4
1993–94: 8.2
1994–95: 7.8
1995–96: 6.9[1]

[1] Provisional outturn.

All figures £ million, excl–VAT.

Housing Stock

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will maintain a golden share after the sell-off of the married housing stock. [29648]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* My Department's continuing interest in the married quarters estate will be reflected in the terms of the leases, and other contractual arrangements, for example the provision for profit share.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29457]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO diplomatic wing does not yet have this information available. We will forward it to the House of Commons Library as soon as possible.

ODA figures on payments made for goods and services to the private sector are not separately held, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29442]

Mr. Hanley: We do not hold this information in the form requested. It could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29420]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO diplomatic wing does not use performance bonds in the United Kingdom. Performance bonds are used in overseas countries where it is standard practice to use such bonds, and where the risk of technical or financial failure is high.

The ODA uses performance bonds in accordance with normal commercial practice on capital aid contracts between overseas clients and United Kingdom contractors.

The FCO (DW) has not called in any performance bonds during the last five years. The ODA has called in one; the money was used to complete the contract.

In both the FCO (DW) and ODA, information about performance bonds is not held on companies according to the number of employees.

Sudan

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about human rights violation in the Nuba mountain region in Sudan. [29897]

Mr. Hanley: We have received disturbing reports of human rights violations in the Nuba mountains. Access to the area is difficult because of the civil war, but there is evidence of a policy of forced arabisation and islamisation of the Nuba people. The United Nations special rapporteur has stated that a large number of civilians, including women and children, have been killed in attacks by Government forces, or summarily executed.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the forced acculturation policy of the Sudanese Government. [29898]

Mr. Hanley: There is credible evidence, including that cited by the United Nations special rapporteur, Dr. Biro, that the Sudanese Government have been conducting forced islamisation and arabisation, notably in the Nuba mountains, in the camps for southern Sudanese in northern Sudan, and among children.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding human rights violations in Sudan. [29899]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on 13 May, column *360*.

Bhutan

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning human rights in Bhutan; and if he will make a statement. [29738]

Mr. Hanley: A representative of the Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal called on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 22 March. The human rights situation in Bhutan was discussed. A number of British non-governmental organisations have also raised the issue with us.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the number of refugees who have recently left Bhutan for Nepal and the reasons for their departure; and what assistance is being provided by the United Kingdom to assist those refugees. [29739]

Mr. Hanley: We understand that only a few family groups have arrived in Nepal from Bhutan over recent months. The United Kingdom has contributed more than £475,000 to refugee relief in Nepal over the past three years.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Indian Government about the detention of appeal marchers campaigning for change in Bhutan; how many such marchers were detailed; how many remain in custody; and if he will make a statement. [29740]

Mr. Hanley: While we discussed Bhutan in our bilateral talks with India on 28 March, we have made no specific representations to the Indian Government about the arrest of the marchers, but we continue to monitor the situation closely with our EU partners. We understand that about 1,400 marchers have been arrested, of whom 792 remain in custody.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the outcome of the 7th round of inter-ministerial talks on Bhutan and Nepal; what steps he is taking to ensure *(a)* the constructive involvement of India in those talks and *(b)* a just resolution of the problems with which they are dealing; and if he will make a statement. [29741]

Mr. Hanley: The latest round of inter-ministerial talks between Bhutan and Nepal in Kathmandu on 4 to 8 April ended with agreement to continue the talks in Thimpu, though no dates were set. We have regularly raised Bhutan in bilateral talks with India—most recently on 28 March. We believe that negotiation between Bhutan and Nepal offers the best solution to this problem and will continue to encourage both governments in this.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* the terms of the resolution of 14 March passed by the European Parliament in relation to refugees from Bhutan. [29742]

Mr. Hanley: I am arranging for the resolution to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Overseas Visits (Royal Family)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *362*, (1) when the detailed records relating to the royal visit to Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in 1986 were destroyed; [30031]

(2) when it became his Department's policy to destroy detailed records relating to overseas visits. [30032]

Mr. Rifkind: Accounting records, including those relating to royal visits overseas are destroyed in accordance with guidelines agreed with the National Audit Office which require that detailed invoices are kept a minimum of three years.

All detailed accounting records relating to 1986 were destroyed during the routine weeding of documents. The date of destruction was not noted.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what budgetary controls exist within his Department in respect of costs arising from royal visits abroad. [30033]

Mr. Rifkind: An overall cost estimate is provided before each visit is agreed. A detailed estimate is then agreed with the household concerned. Expenditure is subsequently checked against invoices and statements provided by the household.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Uganda

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made on the recent elections in Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [29896]

Mr. Hanley: International observers have concluded that the presidential elections, which were won by President Museveni with 72.4 per cent. of the vote, were carried out in a transparent manner and in accordance with the interim election statute and that the result reflects the polling process. We welcome this further step in Uganda's constitutional development.

Know-how Funds

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions and in relation to which contracts United Kingdom contractors and consultants who have been engaged on know-how fund sponsored contracts in 1994 were given such contracts without a requirement to tender. [30172]

Mr. Hanley: This answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list all projects funded by the know-how fund in 1994 relating to food distribution in Moscow; [30171]

(2) on what occasions and in relation to which contracts, contracts sponsored under the know-how fund in Moscow in 1994 were allocated and subsequently extended without being the subject of tendering or retendering procedures; [30173]

(3) if he will list all United Kingdom contractors and consultants who have been engaged on know-how fund sponsored food distribution projects in 1994. [30174]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested will take some time to complete. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts (Witnesses)

31. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are taken to inform witnesses of *(a)* delays and *(b)* procedures in magistrates courts. [28792]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: It is generally for the prosecution and the defence to keep their witnesses informed. However, both magistrates and court staff will assist witnesses at the court to the extent that they properly can.

Royal Family (Records)

32. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what basis records relating to members of the royal family are not released to the Public Record Office. [28793]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As announced in 1993, in the White Paper on Open Government, public records relating to the royal family will be treated in the same way as all other records and closed for longer than 30 years only if they fall into one or more of the three criteria governing closure.

Pension Sharing

33. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his proposals in respect of pension sharing in the Family Law Bill; when those provisions will come into force; and if he will make a statement. [28794]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There are a number of issues which need to be resolved before pension splitting could be introduced. The Government intend to issue a Green Paper this summer to explore all these issues.

Legal Aid

34. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to speed up legal aid payments. [28795]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Several steps have been taken by my Department and by the Legal Aid Board to ensure swift payment to solicitors and barristers for legal aid work. The introduction of standard fee systems and enhanced interim payment mechanisms for franchise holders are examples.

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to improve the legal aid system. [28799]

Mr. Evans: The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper setting out proposals for the reform of legal aid in May 1995. More than 200 responses were received. The Lord Chancellor has examined these responses and expects to publish a White Paper on the future of the legal aid scheme before Parliament rises for the summer.

37. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has recently received about the size of the legal aid budget. [28801]

Mr. Evans: I have received many representations on this matter. As my hon. Friend knows, the Lord Chancellor has announced that he intends to introduce a number of measures to gain more effective control over legal aid expenditure.

Judicial Appointments

35. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many judicial appointments were advertised in 1995. [28797]

Mr. Evans: Out of 149 appointments made to the full-time judiciary in 1995, 84 were made following either advertisement or notice to eligible candidates where eligibility is restricted. Some 550 part-time professional judicial appointments were made in the same year, just over 100 of which were made following either advertisement or notice to eligible candidates.

Commonhold

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress is being made on the introduction of commonhold. [28790]

Mr. Evans: A new draft Bill is being prepared and it remains the Government's intention to publish this for consultation during the summer and to introduce legislation to implement commonhold as soon as possible.

Repossession (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many homes have been repossessed in the west midlands since 1992. [30159]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The questions concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 20 May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of repossessed houses in the West Midlands since 1992.

The figures for the numbers of repossession orders made in the county courts in the West Midlands since 1992 are:

1992: 5,235

1993: 3,358

1994: 2,600

1995: 2,365

1996: 770 (first quarter).

However, not all repossession orders result in actual repossession of the property. The figure for the numbers of actual repossessions is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lord Chief Justice (Appointment)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to consult opposition parties regarding the appointment of a new Lord Chief Justice; and if he will make a statement. [27898]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is responsible for advising the Queen on the appointment of the Lord Chief Justice. In conjunction with the Lord Chancellor, he will ensure that the necessary consultations are undertaken as appropriate.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Primary Schools, Killyleagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils attend the Cedar integrated primary school at Crossgar; how many of these pupils travel from the Killyleagh district; what is the weekly cost to public funds of their travel arrangements; what assessment his Department has made of the impact of this school on enrolment at St. Mary's primary school, Killyleagh; and if he will make a statement. [29877]

Mr. Ancram: At present, 26 pupils attend Cedar integrated primary school. Of these, 12 travel from the Killyleagh district at a weekly cost to public funds of £91.80. The impact of Cedar on all schools in the area, including St. Mary's primary school at Killyleagh, was assessed when the development proposal was considered in 1995. It was considered then that the long-term viability of these schools would not be affected by a new integrated school.

Sainsbury's, Londonderry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the public inquiry was held into the planning application by Sainsbury's in Londonderry; when the planning appeal commission will issue its report; and if he will make a statement. [29902]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 17 May 1996:

Mr Moss has asked me to reply to your question about the Public Inquiry into the planning application by Sainsbury's in Londonderry.

The Public Inquiry, which was held by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC), ran from 20 February 1996 until 29 March 1996, and closing submissions were later made on 16 April 1996.You will appreciate that the report and recommendations of the Inquiry is a matter for the Chief Commissioner. However I understand from the PAC that their report is unlikely to be available before the summer.

I can assure you that when the report is received, it will be carefully considered by the Department before a final decision is reached. The PAC report will of course be made available to the public once the Department's decision has issued.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29438]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29453]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland in 1996–97. [30308]

Mr. Moss: For 1996–97 the following performance targets have been set out for OSNI:

1. To survey 32,000 survey units in the revision programme.

2. To complete 875 data capture units representing 1,716 basic scale map sheets converted to digital format.

3. To update the digital topographical database with 93 per cent. of the updates completed within seven working days of receipt of the field data.

4. To despatch, within seven working days, 92 per cent. of orders for folded and basic scale maps.

5. To reduce unit costs so that they weighted mean percentage reduction of selected representative activities is 3 per cent.

6. To recover from the supply of goods and services, 27 per cent. of the total costs incurred by the agency.

Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets have been set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency during 1996–97. [30310]

Mr. Moss: For 1996–97, the following performance targets have been set:

	Target
Vehicle test appointments	24 days average waiting time
Driving test appointments	48 days average waiting time
Productivity (vehicle testing)	18.0 units per man per day
Productivity (driver testing)	7.9 units per man per day
Error rate	Faulty inspections not to exceed 0.20 per cent. of tests conducted
Level of complaints about booking arrangements	Less than 0.75 per cent. of applications received
Level of complaints about the conduct of tests	Less than 0.75 per cent. of applications received
Level of customer satisfaction with test procedures	At least 85 per cent. plus or minus 2 per cent. within the range of sampling error
Number of compensation payments for cancelled tests	Less than 0.4 per cent. of applications received
Composition unit cost of testing operations	£16.81

Public Record Office

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in 1996–97. [30309]

Mr. Moss: For 1996–97, the following performance targets have been set out for PRONI:

Efficiency

1. To reduce PRONI's composite unit cost in the areas of selecting and accessing, records listing, records storage, document production and reader service by 5 per cent. from £105.21 to £99.95.

2. To manage the agency's workload, including an anticipated 20 per cent. increase in readers and the maintenance of extended opening hours, while absorbing a 4.5 per cent. reduction in staff and ensuring that expenditure is within financial limits approved by the Department.

Quality of Service

3. To process customer queries within 10 working days of receipt in 75 per cent. of cases and within 14 working days in 96 per cent. of cases, thus improving PRONI's citizens charter commitment.

4. To upgrade 10 per cent. of 33,360 linear metres of records stored on mobile shelving at Balmoral avenue, in accordance with defined standards of archival protection.

5. With the help of a new computerised document request system to improve the speed of production to the public by reducing waiting time from 45 minutes to 40 minutes or less in 90 per cent. of cases.

Effectiveness

6. To process 335.5 linear metres of records deposited and to ensure that 100 per cent. of all new "open" material is processed within one year of receipt.

Schools (Intruders and Trespassers)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to give additional powers to school authorities with regard to *(a)* intruders and *(b)* trespassers into schools; and if he will make a statement. [29905]

Mr. Ancram: The Offensive Weapons Bill, which is currently going through the House of Commons, will make it an offence to carry a knife on school premises and give the police the powers of search on school premises. These provisions will be extended to Northern Ireland. In addition, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland is urgently considering the action needed to implement in Northern Ireland the recommendations in the recent report from the working group on school security published on 14 May.

WALES

University Hospital of Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the department of postgraduate medicine at the University hospital of Wales is expected to take over responsibility for all appointments to the specialist registrar grade; if pay arrangements for all specialist registrars are to be centrally funded; and what representations he has received from NHS trusts in Wales and the Department of postgraduate medicine concerning payment arrangements for *(a)* this grade and *(b)* other junior medical staff. [30191]

Mr. Hague: The postgraduate department started taking over the responsibility for operating the appointments procedures for the specialist registrar grade on 1 December 1995 in line with the timetable for commissioning the new grade in each speciality. There is 100 per cent. central funding available, in the first year only, for additional posts and thereafter the postgraduate department will continue to fund 50 per cent. of the salary

costs. Discussions take place with NHS trusts and the postgraduate department as part of the management of these arrangements for all junior medical staff.

Higher Education

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure in Wales on higher education in real terms in each of the past 10 years. [28615]

Mr. Hague: The expenditure on higher education in Wales for the years 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and the provision for 1996–97 is shown in the following table. The amounts include tuition fee income and adjustments relating to dual support provision for research. Prior to 1993–94, higher education was funded from a variety of sources, including the University Grants Committee, the University Funding Council, the Welsh Office and local authorities, and it is not possible to provide comparable expenditure figures for that period.

£ million

1993–94		*1994–95*		*1995–96*		*1996–97*	
Cash	*November 1994 prices*	*Cash*	*November 1994 prices*	*Cash*	*November 1994 prices*	*Cash*	*November 1994 prices*
282.563	287.762	313.744	313.744	311.328	302.996	314.934	298.302

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29447]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29432]

Mr. Hague: My Department does not hold the information requested.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29429]

Mr. Hague: Advice on the use of performance bonds is set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses. This guidance makes it clear that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor. Information regarding the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years is not held by my Department

EU Funding

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the recipients of funding for education and training purposes from the European Union in each of the last three years, giving the programme under which the funding was provided. [29303]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not held centrally.

Rendering and Incineration Facilities

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the letter of 15 May of the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the rendering facilities and incineration facilities available in Wales to be used in conjunction with the abattoirs listed; and if he will make a statement. [30188]

Mr. Hague: There are no rendering facilities in Wales, the intervention board is considering which incinerators in Wales could be used under the scheme.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the letter of the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of 15 May, if he will give details of the pattern of alternating use of the slaughterhouses listed in Wales as between participation in the cull scheme and normal slaughter for sale. [30189]

Mr. Hague: The precise pattern of slaughtering is a matter for abattoirs themselves, as long as they meet the normal hygiene regulations.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the *(a)* slaughtering industry and *(b)* food retailing industry concerning the desirability of (i) exclusive use of slaughterhouses designated for the 30-month and over special beef slaughter schemes and (ii) alternating use of such facilities with normal slaughtering of meat for sale; and if he will make a statement. [30190]

Mr. Hague: *(a)* My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State met a delegation last month.

(b) None.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 214, if he will make it his policy

to give permission to grant an application under section 13 of the Coroners Act 1988 to order a fresh inquest in the case of WPC Yvonne Fletcher. [29296]

The Attorney-General: I have no power to order a fresh inquest. Section 13 of the Coroners Act 1988 permits the High Court to do so where an application is made on my authority. Any request to me for the grant of my authority would be considered on its own merits. In each instance, I consider whether there is a reasonable prospect of establishing that it is necessary or desirable in the interests of justice for a fresh inquest to be held.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

14. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the Government's policies on tourism. [28771]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's work programme set out in "Tourism—Competing with the Best" fully recognises the importance of the industry as a creator of wealth and employment. My Department continues to work in partnership with the industry to improve our competitiveness in the world market. We have made significant progress on measures to help improve quality and value for money in the accommodation sector, and we are developing an agenda for action on the industry's use of its human resources.

24. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations she has received regarding deregulation of the tourism industry; and if she will make a statement. [28783]

Mrs. Bottomley: Last week, I took part in the Government's deregulation seminar for the tourism and hospitality industry. We will respond to the concerns raised about burdensome regulations. Much has already been achieved in the Government's drive towards deregulation, but we will continue to work towards removing unnecessary obstacles to the growth of this £35 billion industry.

National Lottery (Gambling)

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to assess the impact of the national lottery on the gambling habits of individuals. [28774]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The protection of participants in the national lottery is the responsibility of the Director-General of the National Lottery, who has carried out research on playing, and has plans to carry out further work. Gambling is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, whose Department has undertaken to monitor the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy which involves examining betting expenditure.

National Lottery (Drama Groups)

17. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many drama groups have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [28775]

Mr. Sproat: Drama groups throughout the United Kingdom have benefited from the national lottery. To date, there have been 64 awards to a total of over £3.5 million, including, for example, an award to the Weymouth drama club to help it create a new rehearsal and performance space.

Euro 96

18. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what financial support the Government have given to the promotion of cultural events in London at the Euro 96 tournament. [28776]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have contributed £100,000 towards cultural events in the eight host cities, including London. A further £150,000 has been made available from both the Sportsmatch and ABSA business sponsorship schemes, and £130,000 from the Sports Council. A wide range of musical events will also take place as part of the national music festival.

Museums and Galleries

19. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department is spending on capital projects at museums and galleries in 1996–97. [28777]

Mr. Sproat: My Department will provide £217 million in 1996–97 to museum and galleries and to the Museums and Galleries Commission. It is for the boards of these institutions to decide how much of this money should go towards capital projects.

Dance and Drama Students

20. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about future assistance available to young people from the lottery fund to assist them in taking up places in dance and drama schools. [28778]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell).

Millennium

21. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how young people will be encouraged to participate in projects marking the millennium. [28779]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am keen to see young people playing a full part in the millennium celebrations. The Millennium Commission is currently considering applications from partner organisations for its millennium awards. Among the ideas put forward are schemes which offer new opportunities to young people in inner cities. Other commission—funded capital projects will provide opportunities for children to benefit both in terms of education, at sites such as the Earth centre at Doncaster and enjoyment, such as the Sustrans national cycleway.

The Government are currently considering what machinery is needed to co-ordinate other millennium events and projects and they are mindful of the need to involve all sections of the community.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a further statement on her Department's plans to celebrate the millennium. [28772]

Mrs. Bottomley: The Government are currently putting in place machinery to co-ordinate the many projects and events that are being planned around the United Kingdom to celebrate the millennium. These will embrace the projects which the Millennium Commission is funding through the national lottery, including the millennium exhibition and festival. My Department will take the lead in this co-ordination.

Royal Palaces

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans her Department has for improving public access to the royal palaces and their gardens [28781]

Mr. Sproat: The Historic Royal Palaces Agency is responsible for the unoccupied royal palaces, all of which are open to the public. They have plans to improve access for disabled visitors at Hampton Court palace.

The Royal Collection Trust is responsible for public access to the occupied royal palaces. Details are given in the trust's annual report.

Millennium (Christians)

23. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with the established Church regarding the celebrations to mark the 2000 anniversary of the birth of Christ. [28782]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The millennium will be an event for everyone to celebrate. It will also be an important anniversary for all Christians, and I recently met the Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss the Church's role. The Millennium Commission has also met many other faith groups to discuss their part in the celebrations.

FM Radio Frequencies

25. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about the availability of FM radio frequencies. [28785]

Mr. Sproat: My Department receives representations on a wide variety of frequency spectrum issues from time to time.

National Lottery (Conservation)

26. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the funding from the national lottery allocated to the conservation of the United Kingdom built and landscape heritage; and what percentage this represents of total national lottery funding. [28786]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of 189 projects involving the preservation of the built and landscape heritage have received £61.4 million from the heritage lottery fund. These are only two areas of our diverse heritage that the heritage lottery fund supports. The heritage lottery fund is distributing 20 per cent. of the proceeds of the national lottery to heritage projects. In total it has made 302 awards to a value of 172.3 million.

The Amsterdam

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress is being made in resolving the outstanding problems with the Dutch Government over responsibility for the wreck of the Dutch East Indiaman the Amsterdam. [28773]

Mr. Sproat: The Dutch Government is the owner of the wreck of the Amsterdam. I understand that they have been approached by a local group and have entered into discussion on the future of the wreck. My officials are being kept informed of developments by the Dutch Government.

Playing Fields

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her policy for playing fields. [29027]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are seriously concerned at the loss of playing fields and attach a high priority to ensuring that people have access to high quality sports facilities. Following a commitment made in "Sport: Raising the Game", the Government consulted on proposals that the Sports Council should become a statutory consultee for development affecting playing fields. Responses indicated broad support and, subject to further consideration of some technical and legal points, it is expected that the necessary statutory instrument will come into force in July.

SCOTLAND

Mr. and Mrs. McInnes

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to public funds of disinterring the cadavers of Mr. John McInnes and his mother; and if he will make a statement. [29508]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The estimated cost of exhuming and re-interring the bodies of Mr. McInnes and his mother by Strathclyde police is approximately £2,900. I fully appreciate how distressing this must be for the family and relatives of Mr. and Mrs. McInnes and I am glad that the bodies have now been re-buried. While this is, of course, a police operational matter in which Ministers have no powers to intervene, I hope that the investigations can now be concluded as speedily as possible.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the number of items of equipment and furniture that (i) have been stolen and (ii) are otherwise accounted for from the (1) Scottish Home and Health Department, (2) Scottish Industry Department, (3) Scottish Education, (4) Scottish Environmental Department in each of the past five years specifying any such items valued at £5,000, and showing information technology material separately. [28756]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on 18 March.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29437]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *590*, to her question on total spend with small and medium enterprises. Our financial and procurement systems in use in 1995–96 and earlier years had no facility for categorising suppliers according to their number of employees.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Crown Office will conduct an inquiry into the implications for the Lockerbie inquiry of developments in respect of the forensic science laboratory in Kent. [30187]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: An independent scientific review is to be conducted by Professor Brian Caddy which will consider the instances where contamination might have taken place from the particular centrifuge in question. It would be quite wrong to attempt to pre-empt the results of that review by indulging in speculation concerning what those results might be. It is a matter of public record that residues of both RDX and PETN, which are components of a high performance plastic explosive, semtex, were identified in debris from the Lockerbie disaster by the forensic explosives laboratory. I understand from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that the evidence which forms the basis of the charges against the two Libyans does not depend on the identification of the high performance plastic explosive which destroyed the aircraft at Lockerbie.

Crofters (Building Grants and Loans)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the Committee of Public Accounts set out in paragraphs 29 to 33 of its 17th report, Session 1989–90, "Grants to Aid the Structure of Agriculture in Great Britain" (HC 150). [29573]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* My right hon. Friend broadly agrees with the conclusions about the crofters building grants and loans scheme expressed by the Public Accounts Committee in its 17th report for Session 1989–90. However, he also believes that it is important to consider from time to time whether there are ways of getting better value for money from Government spending. In his statement to the Scottish Grand Committee, he indicated that CBGLS would continue in its present form. This decision is based on a judgment that the scheme continues to play a key role in improving housing conditions in crofting areas.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department or the Lord Advocate's Department; and if he will make a statement. [29367]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* Since January 1995, no Minister from the Scottish Office has attended a meeting organised by the Council of Europe. The Solicitor-General has attended one such meeting. Officials from the Scottish Office attend Council of Europe meetings whenever there is a subject on which Scotland has interest or a particular expertise. Since January 1995 three such meetings have been attended.

Cullen Inquiry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many firms of solicitors are to represent the families of the deceased at the Cullen inquiry; and how many families are to be represented by each firm. [29942]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* One firm of solicitors represents the families of all the deceased children. A different firm represents the family of the deceased teacher.

Caledonian MacBrayne

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *434*, if he will list all the factors involved in the need to increase the revenue deficit grant to Caledonian MacBrayne in 1996–97; if he will indicate the compliance costs associated with additional safety requirements applying to ro-ro ferries; and if he will make a statement. [29940]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. prepares an annual report and accounts which comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 1985, and which are presented each year to Parliament in accordance with section 8(1) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 1989. The Government do not consider that it is appropriate to disclose more detailed information about the company's revenues and expenditure than is contained in the published annual report and accounts.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the average waiting time a defendant has had to wait between being charged and the subsequent trial in sheriff courts in the last five years. [28670]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available.

HEALTH

Speech and Language Therapists

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of speech and language therapists at each grade from spine points 23 to 27 in each of the past five years. [28445]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. A new pay and grade system, using pay points on a single spine, was introduced in March 1991. Data are available only by the new spine points from September 1991 to September 1994, which is the latest year

available. The figures are "snapshots" of a process of gradual transition which was on-going throughout the period 1991 to 1994.

National Health Service Hospital and Community Health Services speech and language therapists on spine points 23 to 27 in England at 30 September each year 1991 to 1994

Whole-time equivalents

NHS HCHS	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Speech and language therapists on spine points 23 to 27	730	700	690	690

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Long-term Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of one year's long-term care for a disabled person. [29033]

Mr. Bowis: Information collected centrally on expenditure and use of care relates to the client group and not to the nature of an individual's disability. Provisional 1994–95 figures are of a gross cost to local authorities of £18,000 per supported physically or learning disabled resident in residential or nursing homes—calculated from reported gross expenditure divided by the average number of supported residents at the beginning and end of the financial year.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of disabled people in Britain need long-term care. [29031]

Mr. Bowis: Information on the percentage of disabled people in need of long-term care is not available centrally.

Duplicate NHS Numbers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many duplicate NHS numbers have been issued by his Department; what plans he has to end this duplication; and if he will make a statement. [29697]

Mr. Horam: Duplicate national health service numbers have so far been issued to some 7,500 newly registered babies

We are able to identify duplicate numbers quickly. Until the problem is resolved, the NHS central register is giving all of the babies concerned new NHS numbers to replace the duplicate numbers issued originally.

More than one option has been identified to prevent the issuing of duplicate numbers and these options are being evaluated. The study is due to make its recommendations at the end of May 1996. The chosen option will be implemented as quickly as possible.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the payments made to GP fundholders in each region in each year since 1990–91 in *(a)* management allowances and *(b)* computer costs. [29401]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Health gave him on 26 January 1994, column *300*; the reply I gave him on 25 January 1995, columns *259–60*; and the reply I gave him on 18 July 1995, columns *1152*.

Information about management allowances in 1994–95 is shown in the table. Information about 1995-96 is not yet available.

Practice fund management allowance by region

Region	*1994–95* £
Northern and Yorkshire	8,341,650
Trent	8,020,837
Anglian and Oxford	6,940,223
North Thames	7,892,904
South Thames	9,589,025
South and West	6,823,238
West Midlands	9,052,199
North West	8,261,032

Source:
Annual financial returns of Family Health Services Authorities.

Redundancies

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1134*, if he will update the figures of redundancy payments. [29473]

Mr. Malone: Expenditure by Dorset Healthcare trust has been amended from £88,293 to £23,394, a difference of £64,889 as a result of a validation exercise. This exercise has not yet been concluded and the figures for 1994–95 remain provisional.

Research Fraud

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what study his Department has commissioned through the scientific research councils into the prevalence of research fraud; and what plans he has to commission further studies. [29566]

Mr. Malone: It is the responsibility of the whole medical research community and all its sponsors to ensure good practice in the conduct of research and this operates primarily through the principles of peer review and through guidelines on good practice. The Department's research programmes cover research into health and social care of relevance to the Department and the national health service. The Department has not commissioned work on the more general issues of research conduct and there are no plans, currently, to do so.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations in respect of misconduct are undertaken before research funds are allocated to units undertaking research; and what plans he has to increase the level of these investigations. [29563]

Mr Malone: The Department is committed to maintaining high standards in the commissioning and management of research which operates primarily through peer review and through guidelines on good practice—the Department's code of practice for commissioning and managing research, introduced in 1992.

Research commissioned by the Department, whether from an individual or an academic institution, is subject to the terms of an agreed contract which embodies the code of practice.

With such research management arrangements in place, it is not considered necessary to carry out separate investigations in respect of misconduct before research funds are allocated and there are no plans, at present, to introduce such investigations in the future.

Codes of Research

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Government-funded scientific research units have developed printed codes of research, which they require junior scientists undertaking research for the first time to sign; and if he will make a statement. [29560]

Mr. Malone: The Department has had a code of practice for the commissioning and management of research and development in place since 1992 to help ensure quality and relevance of research funded by this Department. The management arrangements of all research undertaken by the Department, and by the non-departmental public bodies funded by the Department, is reviewed annually with particular emphasis on the application of the code of practice. The conditions of employment of researchers are a matter for the employing authority. Any research commissioned by the Department, whether from an individual or from an academic institution, is subject to the terms of an agreed contract which embodies the principles of the code of practice.

Codes of research in other scientific research units are the responsibility of the Office of Science and Technology.

Health Visitors

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the policy of general practitioner alignment of health visitors; and if he will publish the results of that review. [29567]

Mr. Horam: Health visitors work very closely with their general practitioner colleagues, other members of the primary health care team and the practice population.

From 1973, some district nurses and health visitors have become attached to GP practices and this has enhanced both the practice team and patient care.

We are currently completing a major listening exercise about primary care. A report will be published in June this year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the target requirements for health visitors to visit a new patient within five working days. [29549]

Mr. Horam: The patients charter standard is based on current good practice. It is a challenging but achievable standard, and there are no plans to review it.

NHS Spending

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of spending in the UK on the NHS, expressed as a percentage of total public spending, in each year since 1974. [29643]

Mr. Horam: A consistent series of figures is available only from 1978–79. The information is in the table:

Year	*UK expenditure on the national health service as a percentage of general Government expenditure(X)*[1]
1978–79	10.9
1979–80	10.7
1980–81	11.4
1981–82	11.6
1982–83	11.5
1983–84	11.4
1984–85	11.3
1985–86	11.4
1986–87	11.6
1987–88	12.0
1988–89	12.6
1989–90	12.5
1990–91	12.7
1991–92	13.2
1992–93	13.1
1993–94	12.9
1994–95	13.0
1995–96 (estimated outturn)	13.3

[1] GGE(X) is General Government Expenditure excluding privatisation proceeds and lottery-financed spending and net of interest and dividend receipts.

Biomedical Research

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning conflicts of interest in biomedical research where Government bodies fund such research; and if he will make a statement. [29561]

Mr. Malone: We have received no representations concerning conflicts of interest in biomedical research where Government bodies fund such research.

Children (Part-time Employment)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of children under 16 years of age who are in part-time employment; and how many of these have a work permit issued by their local education authority. [29762]

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available centrally.

NHS Funding

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the 1996–97 hospital and community health services revenue and capital initial cash limits for the new health authorities. [30301]

Mr. Dorrell: The initial revenue and capital cash limits for the new health authorities are given in the table.

Initial revenue and capital health authority cash limits 1996–97

£ Thousands

Health authority	*Revenue*	*Capital*
Avon	446,698	1,154
Barking and Havering	177,756	150
Barnet	156,473	150
Barnsley	105,813	50
Bedfordshire	219,196	207
Berkshire	306,754	2,263
Bexley and Greenwich	218,162	150
Birmingham	486,127	0
Bradford	221,047	166
Brent and Harrow	240,436	150
Bromley	139,767	150
Buckinghamshire	257,079	142
Bury and Rochdale	190,905	50
Calderdale and Kirklees	259,116	150
Cambridge and Huntingdon	172,426	171
Camden and Islington	267,128	150
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	222,276	30
County Durham	284,093	143
Coventry	132,500	0
Croydon	151,840	150
Doncaster	142,523	50
Dorset	318,759	269
Dudley	129,748	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	355,007	150
East and North Hertfordshire .	207,626	150
East Kent	278,584	125
East Lancashire	238,011	50
East London and the City	371,616	150
East Norfolk	272,670	396
East Riding	254,870	143
East Surrey	210,147	125
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	362,816	150
Enfield and Haringey	246,813	150
Gateshead and South Tyneside	183,047	150
Gloucestershire	245,530	35
Herefordshire	69,232	0
Hillingdon	115,707	150
Isle of Wight	66,049	103
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	255,849	150
Kingston and Richmond	153,982	150
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	429,493	150
Leeds	357,241	310
Leicestershire	372,566	75
Lincolnshire	272,460	75
Liverpool	243,585	50
Manchester	242,731	50
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	325,262	150
Morecambe Bay	148,295	50
Newcastle and North Tyneside	241,703	150
North and East Devon	220,671	48
North and Mid Hampshire	210,883	1,216
North Cheshire	140,382	50
North Cumbria	141,757	143
North Derbyshire	161,168	63
North Essex	360,399	150
North Nottinghamshire	168,652	63
North Staffordshire	213,409	127
North West Anglia	173,966	83
North West Lancashire	240,451	50
North Yorkshire	306,549	143
Northamptonshire	244,615	158
Northumberland	140,212	143
Nottingham[1]	277,152	–1,925
Oxfordshire	234,274	192
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	226,739	672
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	226,421	150
Rotherham	113,818	50
Salford and Trafford	215,496	50
Sandwell	140,838	0
Sefton	150,704	50
Sheffield	313,708	75
Shropshire	170,289	0
Solihull	81,672	0
Somerset	207,728	49
South and West Devon	274,403	513
South Cheshire	278,245	50
South Derbyshire	240,007	75
South Essex	294,858	150
South Humber	138,672	100
South Lancashire	134,482	50
South Staffordshire	230,150	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	225,817	469
St. Helens and Knowsley	152,142	50
Stockport	118,465	50
Suffolk	277,814	365
Sunderland	141,000	143
Tees	256,295	143
Wakefield	150,119	125
Walsall	114,610	0
Warwickshire	234,862	0
West Hertfordshire	227,514	150
West Kent	399,006	125
West Pennine	213,036	50
West Surrey	270,165	125
West Sussex	332,497	150
Wigan and Bolton	256,944	50
Wiltshire	247,233	863
Wirral	151,317	50
Wolverhampton	111,460	600
Worcestershire	214,114	0
England	22,534,694	15,526

[1] Receipts from Asset sales exceed Health Authority planned capital expenditure.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29421]

Mr. Horam: The Department has not required any performance bonds in the last five years. Advice on the use of performance bonds is set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and Guarantees", copies of which are available in the Library. This makes it clear that a performance bond is no substitute for considered judgments about the risks attached to a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractors. These judgments apply, irrespective of the size of the contractor.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29441]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected. To do so would add an unnecessary burden on suppliers.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *490*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991. [29900]

Mr. Horam: It is not always possible to distinguish between scientific and engineering specialisms. Figures for 1991 are not available for the Medicines Control Agency.

Whole-time equivalents

Medicines control agency	*April 1991*	*April 1992*	*April 1993*	*April 1994*	*April 1995*	*April 1996*
UG7(S)	n/a	2.5	3.6	7	8	6
Senior Scientific Officer	n/a	2	2	3	4	3
Higher Scientific Officer	n/a	3	4.6	22	23	23
Scientific Officer	n/a	7	13	18	17	17
Assistant Scientific Officer	n/a	0	3	5	8	8
Total	n/a	14.5	26.2	55	60	57
Medical devices agency (formed in September 1994)						
UG5	—	—	—	—	2	1
UG6	—	—	—	—	4	3
UG7	—	—	—	—	18.5	14.6
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	—	—	—	—	41.5	34.8
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	—	—	—	—	23.5	14.4
Professional and Technical Officer	—	—	—	—	6	10
Technical Officer II	—	—	—	—	1	1
Total	—	—	—	—	96.5	78.8
NHS estates agency						
UG5	1	2	2	2	2	2
UG6	1	1	1	1	1	4
UG7	9	9	12	13	14	17
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	4	5	6	6	6	3
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	2	2	2	2	2	3
Total	17	19	23	24	25	29

There are no scientific and engineering staff in the National Health Service Pensions Agency.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *490*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each of the unified grades in the headquarters division of his Department in each year since 1991. [29835]

Mr. Horam: Information for Department of Health headquarters only is not available prior to April 1995. Information for 1995 and 1996 is set out as follows.

Scientifc staff numbers (whole-time equivalents)

	April 1995	*April 1996*
UGS	[1]—	5
UG6	[1]—	6
UG7	[1]—	26
Senior Scientific Officer	19	17.7
Higher Scientific Officer	13	13.4
Scientific Officer	9	11
Assistant Scientific Officer	0.8	0.7
Total	41.8	79.8

[1] Unable to identify scientists from the unified grades for this period.

Engineering staff numbers

There are no staff in the Department of Health Headquarters divisions employed as engineers.

Pharmacists

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to alleviate the clawback of settlement discount to pharmacists from wholesalers when that discount has not been received by pharmacists. [29575]

Mr. Malone: None. The discount clawback system is based on an assessment of discounts received by all pharmacists for drugs and appliances dispensed against NHS prescriptions. The incentive for individual pharmacists is to achieve at least the average level of discount for the value of items dispensed.

Mr Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to protect community pharmacists in the event of the breakdown of resale price maintenance. [29576]

Mr. Malone: The review of resale price maintenance on medicaments being undertaken by the Director General of Fair Trading is a matter for the director general. Representations concerning the viability of community pharmacies and other aspects of the review should be made direct to him.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29456]

Mr. Horam: From an examination of the payment records of the Department and its agencies, it is estimated that payments of about £130 million were made to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to speed up payments to community pharmacists. [29574]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 12 December 1995, column *580*.

Medical and Surgical Services

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's current policy on the concentration of individual medical and surgical services, other than cancer services, at fewer hospitals. [29744]

Mr. Horam: Each individual case will be considered on its merits balancing the loss of choice, access, competition and responsiveness that may follow concentration against any gains in quality of patient care or economies of scale where these cannot otherwise be achieved.

The Department has issued guidance, HSG (94)55, on the subject "The Operation of the NHS Internal Market: Local Freedoms, National Responsibilities", copies of which are available in the Library. We have also commissioned a short study into concentration and choice in acute services from a team led by Trevor Sheldon of the centre for reviews and dissemination in York.

Hospitals (Training Centres)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made as to which hospitals in the north-west are insufficiently large to be registered as training centres. [29745]

Mr. Malone: None; the Department does not register hospitals for training purposes. Training posts or programmes for junior doctors are approved by the relevant medical royal colleges.

Vitamin K

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to license oral vitamin K for infants. [30009]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency has had extensive discussions about the licensing of oral vitamin K. Currently, no marketing authorisation for oral vitamin K for infants has been granted. Information about all applications for a marketing authorisation for a medicinal product is confidential and no information can be released until the announcement is made in the London, Belfast and Edinburgh gazettes that a marketing authorisation has been granted.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidance on the use of intra-muscular vitamin K for infants. [30010]

Mr. Horam: The chief medical officer and chief nursing officer issued guidance on the use of intramuscular vitamin K for infants in December 1992. They await the results of departmental commissioned research, expected during 1996, to inform further guidance.

Hip Replacements

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations were performed in 1995 on the national health service; how many were on patients from general practitioners fundholder practices; and how many patients had waited *(a)* more than and *(b)* less than one year. [29768]

Mr. Horam: The latest available information relates to 1993–94 and is shown in the table.

Hip replacement and other arthroplasty of the hip operations, Finished Consultant Episodes 1993–94

	General practitioner fundholder	*District health authorities funded*	*Other*	*Totals*
Emergency	348	21,519	650	22,517
Planned	154	467	17	638
Booked and waiting list cases				
Less than one year	6,451	20,317	1,498	28,266
More than one year	1,059	4,250	159	5,468
Time not known	365	1,285	110	1,760

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics—Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Vehicles (Child Restraints)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will discuss with the Department of Transport the requirement on national health service trusts to implement a policy of child restraints in all vehicles used for the transport of children. [29550]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

There are several hundred NHS trusts in England which, although accountable to the Secretary of State for Health, have considerable autonomy over their day-to-day operations. Some trusts may have their own guidelines on child restraints, although I have no details on this. However, the Department of Health has informed me that it has no plans to issue any specific guidelines.

Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *751*, if he will give a breakdown of the sum of £821, 986 devoted to running the spontaneous adverse drug reaction reporting scheme in 1994–95. [26256]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 April 1996]:* This figure relates to the budget allocated to the ADROIT—adverse drug reactions on-line information

tracking—group of the Medicines Control Agency, which is responsible for the day-to-day running of the United Kingdom's spontaneous adverse drug reaction reporting scheme. Of this amount, £612,482 relates to the basic salary of staff working within the unit—excluding national insurance and pension contributions—and £209,504 relates to the costs of running and maintaining the ADROIT database for the financial year 1994–95. This database records all reports of adverse drugs reactions received from doctors and pharmaceutical companies.

NHS Paperwork

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the report of the efficiency scrutiny into the burden of paperwork in NHS trusts and health authorities will be published. [30012]

Mr. Dorrell: I will be publishing the report on Tuesday 21 May. Copies will be available from the Vote Office and Library from 11am on that day.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 May 1996

HEALTH

Asthma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column 34, when he expects to announce his conclusions on the inclusion of asthma as a target area in the "The Health of the Nation". [29201]

Mr. Horam: In due course.

Research

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the measures he has taken to prevent conflicts of interest in biomedical research addressed by the Government bodies funding such research. [29562]

Mr. Malone: The Department is committed to maintaining high standards in the management of research commissioned by the Department through peer review and guidelines on good practice—the Department's code of practice for commissioning and managing research, introduced in 1992.

Guidelines on the protocols that govern the operations of the national health service research and development programme, including conflicts of interest, have been issued to all those working within the programme. Under the guidelines members and the chairperson of NHS research and development commissioning groups are reminded of the need for impartiality in the commissioning of research and advised that they must declare a conflict of interest when one occurs and withdraw from the discussion.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each of the last five years, the number of cases of research sponsored by Government agencies which have been shown to be fraudulent; and if he will list the estimated cost to public funds of that misconduct. [29564]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many scientific research units in the United Kingdom supported by Government funds have held formal courses in the organisational ethics of scientific research in the past two years. [29559]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Training carried out by research units is a matter for directors of the individual research units concerned.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on liaison between his Department and private research charities about research fraud. [29565]

Mr. Malone: The Department gives a high priority to collaborating with other research funders to increase understanding of matters of mutual concern and to promote co-operation.

We work closely with the Association of Medical Research Charities, which represents some 48 charities. The AMRC is also represented on the national forum which brings together a wide range of research funders and provides an important means of establishing closer links between research interests in the NHS and elsewhere.

Within this framework, the guidelines for good research practice to which different research sponsors adhere are discussed and kept under review.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the procedure his Department follows when a case of suspected misconduct in medical research is reported to it. [30005]

Mr. Malone: Any allegation of misconduct in medical research reported to the Department would, in the first instance, be referred to the host institution for investigation in line with the clearly agreed terms of the contract signed between the Department and the research organisation.

If necessary, following the outcome of the inquiry, the complaint would be referred to the relevant professional body for further investigation. The Department would ensure that it was fully informed of the result of these inquiries and would, if appropriate, terminate any contract in place at that time.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30119]

Mr. Horam: Since the "Competing for Quality" programme started in 1992–93, the Department of Health's four executive agencies have market tested activities with a total value of £10.68 million with resulting savings of £3.66 million. This is broken down by agency in the table.

£ million

Agency	*Cost of activity before competition*[1]	*Resulting savings*[1]
Medicines Control Agency	0.260	0.132
Medical Devices Agency	0.195	0.150
NHS Estates Agency	2.981	0.041
NHS Pensions Agency	7.248	3.339

[1] Rounded up to 3 figures.

School Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* school nurses and *(b)* school doctors have been employed by the NHS in each NHS region in each of the last seven years. [28454]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* The information relating to school nurses is shown in the table. School nurses provide health surveillance for children who miss child health or general practitioner health screening, immunisation and developmental checks. The latest data available, published in October 1994, shows that 96 per cent. or 25,400 general practitioners perform childhood immunisations and 94 per cent. 24,900 carry out child health surveillance.

School doctors include community paediatrician and general practitioners depending on local arrangements and therefore cannot be identified separately in Department statistics.

NHS hospital and community health services qualified nursing and midwifery staff, excluding agency staff, working in the school nursing area of work by regional health authority in England at 30 September each year 1988 to 1994

Whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
England[1] [2]	2,510	2,480	2,540	2,460	2,440	2,470	2,350
Northern	190	180	180	170	190	170	150
Yorkshire	180	190	180	170	170	180	180
Trent	270	270	260	260	250	290	280
East Anglia	80	90	90	100	100	100	90
North West Thames	200	210	210	170	140	180	170
North East Thames	200	220	220	200	210	210	210
South East Thames[1]	140	110	200	200	210	140	100
South West Thames	130	130	120	110	120	130	130
Wessex	130	120	120	110	110	110	100
Oxford	100	110	120	120	110	130	110
South Western	150	120	120	140	120	130	140
West Midlands	300	310	310	300	310	300	300
Mersey	190	180	180	170	160	150	140
North Western	250	230	230	240	250	250	230

Note:

[1] Figure for South East Thames, and subsequently to a lesser extent the England totals, should be treated with caution. There was evidence of considerable under recording of the occupation codes used to allocate staff to particular areas of work in the South East Thames region in 1989 and several years prior to this.

[2] Figures for 1989 and 1990 do not match those previously published due to minor changes to the definition used for earlier years. Figures in this table have been provided using the same definition in each year.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

Totals may not equal sum of components due to rounding.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will urgently commission an inquiry into *(a)* the number of school nurses, *(b)* the provision of funds for training of school nurses and *(c)* the provision of a programme of incentives to encourage recruitment of school nurses. [29548]

Mr. Horam: The Health Select Committee is currently taking evidence on school health services in its inquiry into children's health.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by name the current general practitioner fundholders in the Easington constituency. [30213]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentage of the population served by general practitioner fundholders in each health authority in England. [30584]

Mr. Malone: The percentage of the population served by general practitioner fundholders in each health authority in England is given in the table.

Population coverage by general practitioner fundholders—health authorities in descending order

Health authority	*Coverage (April 1996) percentage*
North Derbyshire	91
Warwickshire	84
Isle of Wight	84
Solihull	82
Worcestershire	82
Wakefield	82
Bury and Rochdale	81
Herefordshire	80
South Derbyshire	79
Kingston and Richmond	77
West Hertfordshire	77
East and North Hertfordshire	76
South Cheshire	75
Sandwell	74
Northumberland	71
Morecambe Bay	71
Buckinghamshire	71
South Humber	69
North Yorkshire	69
West Surrey	67
Lincolnshire	66
East Riding	66
Brent and Harrow	64
Doncaster	64

Population coverage by general practitioner fundholders—health authorities in descending order

Health authority	*Coverage (April 1996) percentage*
North and Mid Hampshire	64
West Sussex	63
East Lancashire	63
Berkshire	62
Barking and Havering	62
Wiltshire	60
Bradford	60
Stockport	60
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	59
East Kent	58
North Essex	57
St. Helens and Knowsley	56
North Staffordshire	55
South Staffordshire	55
West Kent	55
East Norfolk	55
Coventry	54
Oxfordshire	54
Southampton and South West Hampshire	54
Bexley and Greenwich	54
Walsall	53
North Cheshire	52
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	52
Sheffield	52
Leeds	51
Hillingdon	51
Sunderland	50
North West Lancashire	50
County Durham	50
Northamptonshire	50
Dorset	50
Leicestershire	50
Birmingham	49
North West Anglia	49
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	49
Wirral	49
Rotherham	49
North Cumbria	48
North and East Devon	48
Liverpool	48
South Essex	48
Sefton	47
South Lancashire	46
West Pennine	46
Dudley	45
Shropshire	45
Wigan and Bolton	44
Somerset	44
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	44
East Surrey	42
Salford and Trafford	42
Gateshead and South Tyneside	41
North Nottinghamshire	41
South and West Devon	39
Gloucestershire	39
Wolverhampton	39
Barnet	39
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	38
Avon	37
Suffolk	37
Calderdale and Kirklees	35
Newcastle and North Tyneside	35
Barnsley	35
East London and The City	35
Bedfordshire	34
Tees	34
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	32
Croydon	27
Bromley	27
Enfield and Haringey	27
Nottingham	26
Cambridge and Huntingdon	26
Manchester	25
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	23
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	18
Camden and Islington	10

Source:
Regional offices.

Heathway Residential Home, Seaham

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Heathway residential home in Seaham. [30215]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for County Durham health authority, in discussion with Priority Healthcare Wearside national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority for details.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many HIV patients have been provided with IVF treatment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [30237]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally. The decision to provide fertility treatment to any particular patient is one for the clinicians involved, taking into account all the circumstances of the case. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 requires as a condition of any treatment licence issued under the Act that account be taken of the welfare of any child who is born as the result of treatment.

NHS Trust Hospitals (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the chairpersons of each national health service trust hospital covering the Greater London area, indicating the annual salary paid to each for the year 1995–96. [30307]

Mr. Malone: Information on all appointments of chairmen and non-executive directors to national health service authorities and trusts, and the remuneration paid, will be published in the summer of 1996.

Contact Lenses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons get free repeat prescription contact lenses on the ground that they are susceptible to eye infections, for the most recent years for which figures are available. [30357]

Mr. Malone: Where a consultant ophthalmologist decides that a patient requires frequent changes of lenses on clinical grounds, the patient pays only for their first pair unless they are, in any case, entitled to help with national health service charges, in which case they can use their vouchers to help meet the cost. The number of patients who benefit from this provision is not available centrally.

Child Care Workers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which bodies are responsible for checking the suitability of child care workers supplied by employment agencies. [30406]

Mr. Bowis: It is the responsibility of each individual employer to ensure that people they employ to work with children are suitable for such work.

EU Health Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Health Council on 14 May. [29655]

Mr. Malone: The Council took note of a working document submitted by the Commission on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and, after an extensive and constructive debate, agreed conclusions on action to be taken to understand better the pathogenesis and transmissibility of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and to extend epidemiological surveillance of the disease.

The Council agreed a common position text based on the Commission's proposal for a decision adopting a programme of Community action on health monitoring, taking account of the European Parliament's opinion on that proposal.

The Council confirmed that, as a number of European Parliament amendments to its common position text could not be accepted, the Conciliation Committee should be convened to reach agreement on a joint text for a decision adopting a programme of Community action on the prevention of drug dependence.

The Council had a short orientation debate on the Commission's proposal for a decision creating a Community network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases and took note of action in hand to develop a global early warning system and response network for communicable diseases, within the context of the EU-US action plan which was agreed in December last year.

There was a short discussion also of the Commission's amended proposal for a Council directive on the approximation of laws relating to the advertising of tobacco products and of a paper from the Italian presidency that explored possibilities for making progress with the proposal. The presidency concluded that it had not found the basis for a compromise.

Carers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information of a financial nature is required, under guidance issued by his Department, from a spouse who is a carer where the person receiving care, being the marriage partner, requests *(a)* domiciliary services and *(b)* respite care, from a local authority social services department. [29865]

Mr. Bowis: Advice relating to these issues is in the Department's guidance to local authorities, "Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information of a financial nature is required, under guidance issued by his Department is required from a partner of a person to whom he or she provides care where the person receiving care requests *(a)* domiciliary and *(b)* respite care from a local authority social services department and where there is no marital relationship. [29866]

Mr. Bowis: Advice relating to these issues is in an advice note on non-residential services, "Discretionary Charges for Adult Social Services", for use by the social services inspectorate, copies of which are available in the Library.

Euro 96 (Emergency Services)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much additional funding is being accorded to North Manchester hospital emergency services to serve the June Euro 96 competition being held in Manchester. [30040]

Mr. Horam: Trusts are not funded directly by the Department but from contracts with purchasers. The hon. Member may wish to approach Professor Joan Higgins, chairman of Manchester health authority, for details.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30064]

Mr. Horam: The members of staff working centrally in the Department on deregulation issues are a grade 5, a senior executive officer, an executive officer and an administrative officer, a total of 2.5 whole-time equivalents. All are career civil servants. In addition, there is a network of officials around the Department, responsible for co-ordinating deregulation activities in their area of work—where appropriate in close consultation with people from the private sector. The budgeted expenditure for the unit in 1996–97 is £70,000.

NHS Employees

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on *(a)* chief executives and *(b)* senior managers who resign employment with one NHS employer and take up employment with another. [30411]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS executive have declared potential conflicts of interest over the last three years. [30431]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 27 February at column *461*.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS executive have undertaken into conflicts of interests involving (i) trust board and (ii) health authority members. [30432]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 12 July 1995 at column *552*.

Trusts and Health Authorities (Debts)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects on *(a)* debts owed to and *(b)* bad debts written off by (i) trusts and (ii) health authorities. [30426]

Mr. Horam: The Department collects annual returns from each trust and health authority. Included in these returns is the total debtors for each body analysed in accordance with the current generally accepted accounting principles. Unaudited high level analyses are also collected in the year for management purposes.

Prior to the 1995–96 annual returns trusts did not separately analyse bad debts written off. The 1995–96 annual returns will show bad debts and claims abandoned analysed by private patients, overseas visitors and others.

Prior to the 1995–96 annual returning health authorities analysed bad debts and claims abandoned by private in-patients, private non resident patients, overseas visitors, Road Traffic Act claims and other. The 1995–96 annual returns will show the same analysis as trusts.

Health Services (Private Contractors)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which services previously provided by regional health authorities have been won by private contractors; and if he will list the contractors. [30430]

Mr. Horam: There is no information available centrally on all services previously provided by regional health authorities. The table lists the former regional health authority trading agencies which are known to have been transferred to the private sector since 1989.

RHA Service	*Company*
South and West	
Swift IT services	EDS
IT services (Wessex)	AT and T Istel/Hoskyns
Estates department	MRM
West Midlands	
Computer services	AT and T Istel
Legal Services	Lewington Partnership
Payroll services	Hartshead Solway
Parkfields Sterile Supply	CCL Industries
Northern and Yorkshire	
Legal Services	Hampsons
Financial Services	Hartshead Solway
Architects' department	Fletcher Joseph Partnership
Computer services (Northern)	AT and T Istel
Quantity surveying	Beard Dove
IT services (Yorkshire)	Anderson
Architects' services	Fletcher Joseph Partnership
Engineering services	DSSR
Quantity surveying	Edmund Shipway and Partners
Anglia and Oxford	
IT services	SEMA
Legal services	Mills and Reeve
Design services	Roughtons
Mandeville Medicines	Chapter Ltd.
Oxford Consortium	CSC
Architects' department	Bickerdyke Allen and Partners
Engineering services	Couch, Perry and Wilkes
Surveying services	Davies, Langden Everest
North West	
Legal services	Hampsons
Professional Data Care	SMS (UK) Ltd.
Estate services	EML
South Thames	
Estates Design and Management (EDAM)	Capita
Project management services (capital)	AYH
Architects' department	MRM
Engineers' department	Gregory
HCR and SE Computing	Hoskyns
North Thames	
Signet Computer Centre (NE Thames)	Data Med/HBO
IT Services (NW Thames)	SEMA
Trent	
Computer services	AT and T Istel
Engineering Department	Mala and Pearce Design Group
Quantity Surveying	Beard Dove

Patients (Discharge from NHS Care)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on patients who refuse discharge from NHS care. [30428]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Health Authorities and Trusts

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS trusts have *(a)* a chairman, *(b)* a chief executive and *(c)* a board of directors; [30250]

(2) how many NHS health authorities have *(a)* a chairman, *(b)* a chief executive and *(c)* a board of directors. [30251]

Mr. Malone: All 429 national health service trusts and 100 NHS health authorities have chairmen and chief executive posts, and they all have a board of executive and non-executive directors.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on management and administrative spending by individual trusts and health authorities. [30429]

Mr. Malone: For national health service trusts, information is collated on management and management consultancy spending and non-clinical administration spending as defined by the Audit Commission and circulated to trusts under circular FDL(95)32. For health authorities, information is collated on health authority costs as defined in circular FDL(96)20. Copies of FDL(95)32 and FDL(96)20 will be placed in the Library.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *419*, what information his Department collates about consultants. [30438]

Mr. Malone: The annual medical work force census gathers data, as at 30 September each year, on consultant vacancies by specialty. These refer to posts which were vacant for whatever reason on the actual day of collection, including, for example, vacant posts in the process of being filled.

Beta Interferon

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which health authorities trials were conducted on the effectiveness of the drug beta interferon for sufferers of multiple sclerosis; on how many patients; and over what period. [30313]

Mr. Malone: Such information is confidential. Section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 precludes the disclosure of confidential information received in pursuance of the Act.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those authorities which have *(a)* agreed and *(b)* refused to prescribe beta interferon to MS sufferers who are suitably fit to receive it; [30314]

(2) what guidelines have been issued to health authorities regarding the prescription of the drug beta interferon to MS sufferers. [30315]

Mr. Malone: Executive letter (95)/97 issued to health authorities in November 1995 suggested that, where it is clinically appropriate to prescribe beta-interferon to treat multiple sclerosis, it should be prescribed by hospital neurologists. The guidance was accompanied by clinical advice from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee. Decisions about prescribing in individual cases are a matter for clinical judgment.

Health Authorities (Efficiency Targets)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities have failed to meet their efficiency index targets in each of the last two years. [29669]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* 1993–94 and 1994–95 are the last two years for which final figures are available. The national efficiency index targets were applied at regional health authority level for these years and they all achieved them.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what account was taken of the place of residence of the individual granted legal aid in January 1996 (reference 06936J). [30039]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. Legal aid is available for most matters justiciable in the courts of England and Wales, subject to the statutory tests of eligibility.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [29028]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 May. [29029]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will arrange the withdrawal of *(a)* export licences and *(b)* export guarantees issued by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in relation to the supply to India by British Aerospace of Hawk aircraft and the transfer of technology enabling the production of Hawk aircraft in India; and if he will make a statement; [30145]

(2) if he will make representations to British Aerospace urging to cancel any agreement with the Government of India concerning the supply of Hawk aircraft and the transfer of technology enabling India to manufacture Hawk aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [30144]

The Prime Minister: No. I have nothing further to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on 15 May, *Official Report* columns 942–43.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what action Her Majesty's Government have taken in the case of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, in relation to the statement of Colonel George Styles, Professor Hugh Thomas, and Home Office pathologist, Professor Bernard Knight, since the Adjournment debate on 8 May. [29290]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The investigation of crime is a matter for the police. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Department made clear to the House on 8 May, the Metropolitan police are aware of the television programme to which the hon. Member refers, and are reviewing its contents as part of their continuing investigation into the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will extend the conscience clause of the Abortion Act 1967 to non-NHS employees affected by abortion procedures. [30236]

The Prime Minister: The Government always encourage employers to give due consideration to their employees' beliefs and feelings, and to operate fair and objective disciplinary procedures. It has been a longstanding convention that the Government do not initiate change in legislation relating to abortion. It is open to Members of both Houses to introduce proposals for parliamentary consideration.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Correspondence

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter to the hon. Member for Jarrow of 10 May. [29729]

The Attorney-General: No. I have, however, placed in the Libraries of the House a copy of the letter to which the hon. Member refers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column *45*, how many respondents to the consultation on the Asylum and Immigration Bill *(a)* were in favour of the measures and how many against, *(b)* mentioned costs or burdens to business, *(c)* objected to the checking of documents other than national insurance and *(d)* suggested that compliance costs would be higher than those indicated in the compliance cost assessment. [29964]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 May 1996]*: A summary of 67 responses to the consultation document on the prevention of illegal working was made available to the House before report stage of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. It indicates that

Fifteen respondents indicated either support or opposition. Of these four respondents actively supported the particular proposals whereas 11 expressed clear opposition to the principle of employers making any checks on their new employees;

Twenty-seven respondents commented on costs or burdens to business in response to a specific question on compliance costs. Fifteen respondents suggested that compliance costs would be higher than those indicated in the compliance cost assessment. Ten said that they expected no, or very minimal, compliance costs and two indicated that in their view the assessment seemed reasonable.

Three respondents suggested that national insurance numbers should provide the sole defence for employers. Twenty-one respondents indicated that the checking of documents such as foreign passports would be more complicated or onerous, although five suggested that such checking should not be too difficult if written guidance and a telephone helpline were available.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department estimates will be the initial and annual cost per small firm of the implementation of clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [29963]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 May 1996]*: The compliance cost assessment prepared last November estimated that the non-current costs of clause 8 will be £13,524,800. For a firm with under 100 employees non-recurrent costs were estimated to be £10.70. It was estimated that the total recurrent costs for all employers might be up to £11,451,200 or less than 68p per employee per annum, but no assessment was made of the proportion of those costs which might fall to small firms.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the cost to business of clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; how much it will cost each year; and what estimate he has made of the cost to businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29950]

Miss Widdecombe: The compliance cost assessment prepared last November estimated that the non-recurrent costs of clause 8 will be £13,524,800. For a firm with under 100 employees non-recurrent costs were estimated to be £10.70. It was estimated that the total recurrent costs for all employers might be up to £11,451,200 or less than 68p per employee per annum. No assessment was made of the proportion of the recurrent costs which might fall to firms of the sizes mentioned.

Illegal Working Helpline

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the cost of the proposed helpline on illegal working; how many people will staff the helpline; and when it will begin. [29952]

Miss Widdecombe: Details of how the helpline will operate are currently under consideration. Full information about the facility will be given to employers in the written guidance to be issued in due course.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has carried out into the ease with which small employers can identify the documents required under clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [29948]

Miss Widdecombe: In our consultation document, we asked respondents, including representatives of small employers, to comment on this point.

Race Relations

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the funding arrangements after March 1997 for projects funded by his Office under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966; for what reasons there has been a delay in the announcement; and when he expects to be able to notify local education authorities of the arrangements. [29853]

Mr. Kirkhope: The funding position from April 1997 remains under consideration. I expect to be able to let local authorities have more information shortly.

Crimes Against Children (National Registers)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will establish a national register of persons convicted of offences of a violent nature against children; [30423]

(2) if he will establish a national register of persons convicted of offences of a sexual nature against children. [30422]

Mr. Maclean: The national criminal records contain details of all those convicted of offences of a violent or sexual nature against children. In order to strengthen these arrangements, the Government are considering suggestions that convicted sex offenders should be

required by law to notify the police of any changes of address. We plan very shortly to issue a consultation paper which will canvass these and other measures to improve public protection against sex offenders.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist under Home Office guidelines for unsolicited communication to local authority *(a)* social service, *(b)* education and *(c)* youth services departments of the termination of employment of those persons convicted of sexual and or violent offences against children. [30424]

Mr. Maclean: The arrangements under which the police report convictions of employees to local authorities are set out in Home Office circular HOG 45/86 a copy of which is in the Library. it is for the local authority concerned to decide on the action which it wishes to take.

Live Animal Experiments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to increase public scrutiny of project licence applications for experiments on live animals. [30374]

Mr. Sackville: None. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prevents disclosure of confidential information.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many small animals were bred in medical schools in the London area for research purposes over the past five years for which figures are available. [30373]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to increase the publicity given to procedures adopted by the Home Office inspectors overseeing experiments in live animals. [30375]

Mr. Sackville: Public information is already available in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, the guidance to that Act, and the annual statistics published by the Home Office.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the eligibility criteria for appointment to the Animal Procedures Committee; and how many lay-persons are included in the current membership. [30376]

Mr. Sackville: The eligibility criteria for appointment to the Animal Procedures Committee are set out in section 19 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The current membership consists of nine scientists and veterinary surgeons, two academic lawyers, one academic philosopher and four animal welfarists.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has, in relation to the Europol convention, to appoint the data protection registrar to *(a)* the national supervisory body and *(b)* the joint supervisory body; and if he will list the countries which do not submit disputes concerning the convention to the Court of Justice of the European Communities. [29691]

Mr. Maclean: Officials are in discussion with the data protection registrar over a number of aspects of the Europol convention and its implementation. These include the designation of the national supervisory body, members or representatives of which will comprise the United Kingdom delegation on the joint supervisory body.

The Europol convention is not yet in force. On signing the convention, 14 member states made a declaration that they intended to refer to the Court of Justice disputes between them that were not resolved by the Council. The United Kingdom did not make such a declaration.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the implications of the Europol convention for the Data Protection Act 1984 in respect of powers of access of the Data Protection Registrar. [29693]

Mr. Maclean: Ratification of the convention will not require any amendment to the Data Protection Act 1984. Officials are discussing with the data protection registrar practical aspects of its implementation.

Criminal Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to come forward with proposals to allow for wider access to criminal records; if these proposals will include proposals to stop enforced subject access under the Data Protection Act 1984; and if he will make a statement. [29701]

Mr. Maclean: The Government expect to publish a White Paper setting out our proposals for new arrangements for access to criminal record checks within the next few months.

Police National Computer

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to include drink-drive offences on the Phoenix database on the police national computer. [30668]

Mr. Maclean: The police will begin to record drink drive offences on Phoenix from 1 June. This will allow the police, for the first time, to have access to records of drink drive offences dealt with in forces other than their own. Such offences include driving or being in charge of a vehicle when under the influence of drink or drugs and failing to provide a specimen of breath when required to do so.

Fire Safety Legislation

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement and on the implementation of the general fire safety aspects of the EC framework and workplace directives. [30669]

Mr. Sackville: The review was established to examine what scope there might be for rationalising relevant legislation and enforcement arrangements whilst maintaining or improving standards of fire safety. It found that there were overlaps in present legislation and enforcement arrangements which could impose burdens on business and create uncertainty. Consultation on the report showed that while there was general agreement that

existing legislation should be simplified and made more coherent, there was no consensus on what precisely should be done to effect those improvements.

In the light of the consultation exercise we have decided:

- that fire safety should, in general, be treated separately in legislation and that its enforcement should rest principally with fire authorities;
- that the outstanding fire safety elements of the European Community framework and workplace directives will be implemented by regulations to be made under the European Communities Act 1972; we believe that the minimum safety standards required by the directives broadly reflect the safety standards required by existing legal obligations on employers and therefore that the good employer has nothing to fear from the proposed regulations;
- that monitoring, control and supervision of the fire safety aspects of the risk assessment and of the other actions that the regulations require employers to take will be the responsibility of fire authorities;
- that section 9A of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 will be disapplied by the regulations to the extent its provisions overlap with the specific requirements of the regulations;
- that the powers provided under section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 will be applied to the enforcement of the Fire Precautions Act 1971, to improve further the fairness, transparency and consistency of the supervision and control of the Act's requirements;
- to consult, by July, on widening the scope for fire authorities to exempt premises which do not constitute a high risk from the need to have a fire certificate;
- to consult on a revised fire certification system based on risk assessment to target it more accurately at premises where there is a high risk of loss of fire from life;
- to invite the Health and Safety Commission to review in parallel the operation of the Fire Certificates (Special Premises) Regulations 1976 (for which it has policy responsibility);
- to commence consultation in June 1996 on the elimination of overlaps between the physical fire standards in national legislation and fire safety provisions in local acts and byelaws;
- to review physical fire standards and codes of practice to ensure greater consistency and simplification for business. We shall commence consultation in the autumn;
- to bring forward proposals by the summer to amend the building regulations to cover certain physical fire precautions currently covered by fire certification to provide a "one-stop shop" for developers;
- to clarify the respective responsibilities of building control and fire authorities with the aim of streamlining current arrangements to help reduce costs for developers;

We are issuing today for consultation draft regulations intended to give effect to our remaining obligations under the European Community framework and workplace directives. The draft regulations will be made under the European Communities Act 1972. The draft aims to avoid imposing unnecessary burdens and so, where appropriate, follows as closely as possible the language of the directives to ensure that the regulations go no further than strictly required. The duty imposed on all employers by the directives to conduct a risk assessment for their workplaces has generally been implemented by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992. Employers will be able to carry out the fire safety element of the risk assessment either as an integral part of an overall risk assessment, or may undertake it separately.

Where an employer fails to comply with any duty in relation to fire safety, the fire authority may apply to the courts for an order requiring compliance or if the breach is a serious one, may issue an enforcement notice. If the breach is deliberate, reckless and is serious, the employer can be prosecuted.

The powers provided under section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 will be applied to the Fire Precautions Act 1971 by means of a statutory instrument to be laid before Parliament by the end of 1996 and we shall identify other fire safety legislation where these powers could apply. The proposed new regulations to give effect to our Community obligations will also incorporate the principles underlying these powers.

We intend that rationalisation and simplification of the fire safety regime to reduce burdens on business while maintaining necessary safeguards, should be a continuing process. Subject to an analysis of the costs and benefits, we will be looking for further opportunities to rationalise both law and practice.

Copies of the consultation document, which includes the draft regulations, are being placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the actions taken by Her Majesty's Government to support efforts to initiate negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty as cited in paragraph 146 of the statement on the Defence estimates, column 3223; and if he will make a statement on the progress achieved to date in these negotiations. [29979]

Mr. David Davis: We supported the mandate agreed at the conference on disarmament in Geneva in March 1995 for an ad hoc committee to work on a fissile material cut-off treaty banning the future production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We regret that it has not yet proved possible to start work on this issue. We continue to urge all members of the CD to agree to the early establishment of an ad hoc committee to begin negotiations.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30117]

Mr. Hanley: There has been no market testing of the services provided by FCO agencies.

Council of Europe

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the British ambassador to the Council of Europe, on the proposals of the council of Europe Assembly, to up-date the computerisation of its services. [29997]

Mr. David Davis: None so far, but the Council of Europe secretariat is elaborating a package of proposals to go into the 1997 budget. These proposals will draw on the report by the hon. Member and will be discussed with representatives of Governments in Strasbourg. Costs and priorities will need to be borne in mind during any such discussions.

EU Membership Application

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of each applicant for membership of the EU. [30003]

Mr. David Davis: The Government welcome the prospect of EU enlargement and look forward to the applicant countries joining as soon as they are ready. We believe that each applicant should be treated on its merits. Applicants will have to meet the criteria for membership set out by the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993.

Galapagos Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Minister for Overseas Development has had with the Government of Ecuador about the shooting of female goats on those parts of the Alcedo area of the Galapagos Islands where giant tortoises breed. [28908]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There have been no discussions between the ODA and the Ecuadorean Government about shooting goats in the Galapagos Islands. The British ambassador in Quito recently visited the islands to see the problem caused by feral goats on Alcedo which threaten the survival of the population of giant tortoises. The ambassador has offered to donate £5,000 from the heads of mission gift scheme to the national park and to the Darwin Foundation for their programme to protect the tortoises. He is also examining the possibility of a contribution to the goat eradication programme from a FCO fund for small environmental projects.

General Affairs Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU General Affairs Council on 13 to 14 May. [29656]

Mr. David Davis: The "A" points in document 7127/96, which will be placed in the Libraries of the House as soon as it is available, were approved.

The presidency noted the resolutions adopted by European Parliament in document 6216/96, PE-RE 33 and drew attention to Nos. 8 (co-operation on EU fisheries with Morocco), 23 (outcome of Turin European Council), 24 (central and eastern Europe integration into internal market), 30 (Baltic sea co-operation) and 32 (economic and monetary union and social cohesion).

The Council heard a progress report from the chairman of the consultative commission on racism and xenophobia, Jean Khan, about the comission's study on a possible EU observatory on racism and xenophobia.

The Council reached political agreement on draft negotiating directives for a new EU-Mexico agreement. The Commission also presented draft negotiating directives for new agreements between the Community and Cambodia and Laos; and updated agreements between the Community and Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Commission gave a brief report on progress in the negotiations for Euro-Med agreements between the EU and Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon; progress towards opening negotiations with Algeria; and the Commission's exploratory contacts with the Palestinian authority and Syria. The Council decided to reconsult the European Parliament on the text of the MEDA regulation.

The presidency reported on progress in the middle east peace process and Ministers had a meeting in the margins of the Council with Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri. Ministers also discussed reconstruction aid for the Lebanon.

EU high representative Carl Bildt briefed Ministers about the current situation in Bosnia. Mostar administrator Casado briefed the Council on the Mostar elections. Ministers also had a brief discussion on Albania.

The Council agreed the EU-Russia action plan and adopted conclusions reaffirming its support for the reform process, looking forward to free and fair elections, and restating EU willingness to take part in observation of them.

The Council endorsed conclusions on preparation for the World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Singapore in December.

The Council also adopted conclusions on Niger, foreseeing progressive resumption of EU cooperation, subject to a review at the Council on 10 June of the results of the 12 May referendum and the lifting of the ban on political parties; and on Liberia, expressing concern at the humanitarian situation and affirming EU willingness to provide humanitarian aid.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary urged EU partners to agree to a relaxation of the ban on the export of gelatine, tallow and semen.

The second substantive ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference also took place on 13 May. Ministers had before them a presidency note, CONF 3847/96, which has been deposited in the Library of the House, which raised two broad issues for discussion: flexibility of the Union and the efficiency and balance of the institutions. On the former, Ministers considered the desirability of more flexible structures in the Union and whether treaty provisions were necessary to provide a framework for this. On the latter, Ministers considered a range of institutional issues, including the size of the Commission, the scope and weighting of qualified majority voting, the role of the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice, in particular in the light of future enlargement.

The ministerial session was preceded by an exchange of views with the European President and two representatives of the European Parliament.

There were association Councils with Malta and Cyprus on 14 May, followed by a joint structured dialogue meeting and lunch.

Gibraltar

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement about his policy towards that country. [29843]

Mr. David Davis: I visited Gibraltar on 7 and 8 November 1995. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on 14 December 1995 at columns *753–54*.

Bosnia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met Mr. Carl Bildt; and if he will make a statement about the progress of the reconstruction fo Bosnia. [29844]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last met Carl Bildt at the EU General Affairs Council on 13 May.

At the Brussels donors conference on 12 and 13 April, $1.25 billion was pledged for reconstruction projects for the remainder of 1996. United Kingdom bilateral programmes, aimed at restoring power and water supplies to both entities, are well under way.

Croatia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met President Tudjamn; and if he will make a statement about his policy towards the progress of democracy in Croatia. [29845]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary met President Tudgjman on 19 September 1995 in Zagreb.

We continue to encourage the Croatian Government to bring about greater democracy in Croatia so as to achieve stronger political and economic relations with Europe and its institutions.

Diplomatic Representation

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries in the continent of *(a)* Asia, *(b)* Africa, *(c)* America, *(d)* Europe and *(e)* Australasia in which the United Kingdom has diplomatic representation indicating the level of representation, and by number and grade his Department's staff serving in these countries. [29846]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is published in "H.M. Diplomatic Service Overseas Reference List", a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which are members of the Untied Nations in which the United Kingdom has no diplomatic representation. [29847]

Mr. Hanley: The member states of the United Nations in which the United Kingdom has no resident diplomatic representations are listed in table 1. Those states in which an office has been opened but has no UK-based resident staff are listed in table 2.

TABLE 1: MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS WITH NO RESIDENT REPRESENTATION

Andorra
Benin
Bhutan
Burkina Faso
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Djibuti
Dominica
Equatorial Guinea
Gabon
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Iraq
Korea (Democratic People's Republic)
Kyrgyzstan
Liberia
Liechtenstein
Maldives
Mali
Marshall Islands
Mauritania
Micronesia
Moldova
Monaco
Niger
Palau
St. Kitts and Nevis
San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Somalia
Suriname
Tajikistan
Togo
Western Samoa

TABLE 2: MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS WITH NO RESIDENT UK-BASED REPRESENTATION

Afghanistan
Burundi
Eritrea
Haiti
Laos.

Albania

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress of democracy in Albania; and if he will make a statement about his policy towards that country. [29849]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The British Government have good relations with the Government of Albania. We believe that Albania has made good progress towards greater democracy since the fall of communism in 1992.

We are contributing to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission to observe the forthcoming Albanian elections.

Former Warsaw Pact Countries

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likely date of the accession to the North Atlantic treaty of members of the former Warsaw pact. [29850]

Mr. David Davis: NATO has yet to decide when to invite countries from the former Warsaw pact to join the alliance. NATO Foreign Ministers decided in December 1995 to consider the way forward at their meeting this December.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30058]

Mr. Hanley: We are not directly involved in domestic deregulation policy and therefore have no deregulation unit or staff.

British Council

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government propose to make available to the British Council to help with its restructuring costs and to avoid overseas port closures. [30511]

Mr. Rifkind: I have today written to the chairman of the British Council informing him that my Department is prepared to meet 80 per cent. of the actual costs of redundancies among its grant in aid funded UK appointed staff this financial year. I propose to finance this from the Overseas Development Administration's contingency reserve. Since this reserve is higher than originally planned, this can be accommodated without affecting our ability to respond to foreseeable emergencies or reducing planned aid programmes. That part of the funding which serves aid objectives will be provided directly through the ODA vote. For the balance, I shall be seeking parliamentary authority later this year to make the appropriate transfer between the ODA and British Council votes.

In my letter to the chairman I have also assured him that an additional £5 million in 1997–98 and £9 million in 1998–99 will be made available to the Council from within my departmental programme in order to avoid closures of British Council offices overseas to help sustain their programmes in priority countries and to contribute towards their continuing redundancy costs.

The British Council will of course be continuing with their existing programme of efficiency savings.

DEFENCE

Bosnia and Croatia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has been the total cost to date to his Department of renting property for use as British bases as part of the implementation force operations in *(a)* Bosnia and *(b)* Croatia; [29672]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, if he will update the information on charges for the bases currently used by British members of the implementation force operating in *(a)* Bosnia and *(b)* Croatia. [29824]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* A list of the major sites in Bosnia and Croatia currently occupied by British forces is as follows, together with the monthly charges where these have been established.

Between January and April this year, my Department spend £665,000 and £688,000 on leases for all sites occupied in Bosnia and Croatia respectively.

Bosnia	*Monthly charge £*
Banja Luka—factory	38,000
Bosanski Petrovac—garage	5,000
Bugojno—factory	Not yet known
Glamoc—sawmill and factory	8,000
Gornji Vakuf—2 factories	44,000
Jajce—factory	6,000
Kljuc—depot	Not yet known
Krupa—factory	3,000
Kupres—various sites	34,000
Mrkonjic Grad—2 factories, sawmill and dam	Not yet known
Sanski Most—factory	8,000
Sipovo—3 factories, hotel and sawmill	Not yet known
Tomislavgrad–warehouse and other sites	42,000
Vitez—Bulk Fuel Installation (BFI) and school	3,000
Croatia	
Split—3 factories and warehouse	243,000
Split—North Port and warehouse facilities	Not yet known
Trogir (near split)–Divulje Barracks	No charge

Royal Navy Wrecks

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the recovery of munitions and other weapons from sunken Royal Navy ships; and what environmental monitoring is undertaken at such sites where it has not proved possible to recover military material. [29980]

Mr. Soames: Our policy, in normal circumstances, is to leave munitions and other weapons on Royal Navy wrecks undisturbed. However, recovery may be considered where sensitive technology is involved, or where there is a risk that the munitions may fall into the hands of terrorists, criminals or unfriendly foreign powers.

Should munitions be disturbed in some way, consideration may be given to their recovery on a case-by-case basis, taking account, among other things, of the extent of any danger to the public, the potential risk to those who would be involved in the recovery operation, and technical feasibility.

As current scientific evidence shows that, provided they remain undisturbed, such sites do not present a significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment, my Department does not undertake environmental monitoring of wrecks in which there is remaining military material.

Wine and Spirits Stocks

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* number of bottles and *(b)* value of stocks of (i) wine and (ii) spirits are held by (1) the Army, (2) the Royal Navy and (3) the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement. [29999]

Mr. Soames: The only stocks of publicly funded wines and spirits held by the armed forces are for use in cooking, as recipe ingredients. Details of the stocks held for this purpose are not maintained centrally. Spirits can be authorised for issue in special circumstances, but these are purchased only when required. Stock levels of wines and spirits purchased with non-public funds are a matter for individual messes and no central records are held.

Polaris

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of decommissioning the Polaris system; and from which subheads of which votes these funds will be taken. [29871]

Mr. Soames: Details of all costs associated with decommissioning or disposal of equipments and facilities connected with the Polaris programme are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The cost of the defuelling, de-equipping and day-up procedure for the four submarines is expected to total some £61 million; to be attributed to vote 2 subhead 2A21.

Disposal of rocket motors and propellant is expected to cost some £2 million; to be attributed to vote 2 subhead 2F2.

It is not our practice to reveal costs associated with the warhead.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Competitiveness White Paper

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on what date he expects to publish the third competitiveness White Paper. [29955]

Mr. Freeman: The Government plan to publish the third competitiveness White Paper in mid-June.

Deregulation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the deregulation orders which passed into law, indicating which of them affect firms with under *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees. [29959]

Mr. Freeman: The deregulation orders which have passed into law are:

The Deregulation (Greyhound Racing) Order

The Deregulation (Building Societies) Order

The Deregulation (Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868) Order

The Deregulation (Special Hours Certificates) Order

The Deregulation (Fair Trading Act 1973) (Amendment) Merger Reference Time Limits) Order

The Deregulation (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Amendment) (Time Limits) Order

The Deregulation (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Amendment) (Variation of Exempt Agreements) Order

The Deregulation (Length of the School Day) Order

The Deregulation (Long Pull) Order

The first four orders are sectoral measures intended to assist all firms in those sectors, regardless of their size. The next three orders amend competition legislation and, again, could potentially benefit any firm regardless of size.

Civil Service (Ethnic Monitoring)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress of ethnic monitoring within the civil service. [29929]

Mr. Freeman: Equality of opportunity in employment is vital to the effectiveness of the civil service and to good race relations. Ethnic origin monitoring data provides a powerful tool for identifying where barriers exist for the recruitment and advancement of ethnic minority staff. Since 1989 departments and agencies have been working to an agreed code of practice on collecting this information from entrants and existing staff, and they continue to do so. The programme for action on race, introduced by the Cabinet Office in 1990, provides a strategic framework for progress towards race equality in Departments and agencies, which includes monitoring. Regular reports on progress as regards equal opportunities across the civil service are published by the Cabinet Office and placed in the Commons Library. In the year to April 1995, the ethnic minority representation across the civil service rose to 5.4 per cent., which compares with 4.9 per cent. in the economically active population. Information for April 1996 is currently being compiled and will become available later in the year.

Privatised Utilities (Civil Servants)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* serving civil servants and *(b)* retired civil servants have been appointed to the boards of privatised utilities. [30254]

Mr. Freeman: There are currently no serving civil servants who are non-executive directors of any privatised utilities on the list of non-executive directors supplied to the Office of Public Service by Departments. Comprehensive information of this kind on retired civil servants is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Nigeria

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effects of Commonwealth sanctions on Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [29848]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) on 9 May 1996 at column *211*. If Nigeria does not respond positively to the Commonwealth ministerial action group's invitation to dialogue by the end of May, the group has recommended that Commonwealth countries adopt a package of measures broadly similar to those already taken by the EU.

Somaliland

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has evaluated and what contacts he maintains with representatives of the self-styled Republic of Somaliland; what is the position of Her Majesty's Government with respect to that regime; and if he will make a statement. [29968]

Mr. Hanley: Our embassy in Addis Ababa regularly reports on its contacts with the administration in north-west Somalia. Our position remains that the future of that region must be for the Somalis as a whole to determine.

Oslo Conference (20/20 Initiative)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by whom the United Kingdom was represented at the Oslo conference in April to try to consolidate implementation of the 20/20 initiative; and if he will make a statement. [30123]

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom was represented at the April Oslo conference on the 20/20 initiative by the ODA's principal finance officer, chief social development adviser, and an ODA economic adviser.

The Oslo meeting agreed that donors should be prepared to support well-considered plans for enhanced spending on basic social programmes, and recognised that it was now for developing countries to put forward such proposals, initially through consultative groups and round table meetings.

WALES

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has had from organisations and individuals about the implementation of the nursery voucher scheme; and how many replies have been sent. [29332]

Mr. Richards: In addition to a number of petitions, some 3,300 representations have been received to date, the vast majority continuing to consist of printed pro forma letters and postcards; approximately 85 per cent. have been sent a reply and the remainder will have a response as soon as possible.

Out-of-town Superstores

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to limit the spread of superstores in out-of-town locations in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [29610]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has today issued revised planning guidance recognising the importance of town centres and encouraging retail development within those centres rather than at out-of-town sites.

I have arranged for copies of the revised planning guidance to be placed in the Library of the House.

Dental Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients have contacted each family health services authority asking for help in finding a dentist in the period since December 1993; and if he will make a statement. [29602]

Mr. Richards: According to information supplied by Welsh family health services authorities, the following numbers of patients contacted them between the beginning of December 1993 and the end of March 1996:

Clwyd: 6,821
Dyfed: 4,533
Gwent: 3,352
Gwynedd: 15,478
Mid Glamorgan: 584
Powys: 2,466
South Glamorgan: 2,814
West Glamorgan: 221.

The Welsh Office has made £3 million available for a unique initiative aimed at addressing the needs of those areas where patients may have difficulty in registering with a dentist close to their homes. The initiative demonstrates the Government's determination to address the dental manpower needs of Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many family health authorities have been unable to provide emergency dental services in the period since December 1993; and if he will make a statement. [29600]

Mr. Richards: According to information supplied by Welsh family health service authorities, one authority was unable to provide emergency dental services for unregistered patients during the period December 1993 to 1 July 1995. Since 2 July 1995, all authorities have been able to do so.

General dental practitioners are required by their terms of service to provide emergency cover for their registered patients.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many continuing care dental patients have been de-registered; how many dentists have de-registered patients in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [29612]

Mr. Richards: From the information supplied by family health service authorities since August 1992, the number of patients in Wales who have been deregistered is as follows:

	Adults	*Children*	*Total*
1992[1]	8,167	15	8,182
1993	9,138	75	9,213
1994	20,172	53	20,225
1995	18,300	67	18,367
1996[2]	1,750	9	1,759
Totals	57,527	219	57,746

[1] 1 August to 31 December.
[2] To 31 March.

These are cumulative figures and do not indicate how many of those patients subsequently registered with another dentist.

The number of dentists deregistering patients in any fortnightly period has varied between 0 and 38.

This information was supplied for management purposes only and is not statistically validated.

Statistics published by the Dental Practice Board indicate that, at the end of December 1995, the number of registered patients in Wales was 38,194 higher than it was at the end of June 1992.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists have given written notice to have their name removed from dental lists since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [29597]

Mr. Richards: Information supplied by Welsh family health services authorities indicates that 121 dentists gave written notice to have their names removed from dental lists between 1 August 1992 and 31 March 1996. During the same period, 265 dentists joined the authorities' dental lists.

This information was supplied for management purposes only and has not been statistically validated.

Press Office (Expenditure)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total spent by his press office in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [29595]

Mr. Hague: The total spent by my press office, including running costs, is as follows:

1992–93: £360,215

1993–94: £418,370

1994–95: £406,150

1995–96: £395,531.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30068]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office deregulation unit is responsible for promoting and monitoring progress with deregulation activities which are undertaken by policy divisions across the Department. The 1996–97 budget for the unit, which is part of the Department's business services division, is £19,140 for running costs plus £10,000 programme. The unit consists of one higher executive officer, 0.75 whole-time equivalent.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the termination of negotiations with Exel Logistics for the material managements contract under the market testing procedure; [30434]

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the award of the materials management contract under the market testing procedure to the in-house team; and if he will make a statement. [30433]

Mr. Hague: None. My Department was kept informed of developments in the negotiations between the authority and Exel Logistics which led to the decision not to award the contract to the company.

Medical Treatment Centres

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *980*, if he will list the number of procedures available in 1996–97 in each of the treatment centres, indicating the numbers allocated to each health authority. [30408]

Mr. Hague: The number of procedures available in 1996–97 at each of the treatment centres is as follows together with each health authority's allocation:

Health authority	*Surgical centre*	*Ophthalmic centre*	*Orthopaedic centre*
North Wales	0	0	39
Dyfed Powys	190	200	62
Gwent	200	340	60
Bro Taf	310	245	59
Morgannwyg	360	295	44
Total	[1]1,060	[1]1,080	264

[1] These figures were transposed in my previous answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *980*.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when the consultation period will end on the Wales ambulance policy advisory group revision to ambulance service configurations in Wales; [30378]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Wales ambulance policy advisory group consultation paper on ambulance service configurations in Wales. [30377]

Mr. Richards: I have not received any application to reconfigure ambulance services. If such an application is received the document would be subject to public consultation and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the NHS ambulance trusts in Wales, and those ambulance services which form part of a NHS trust in Wales, their budgets for each of the last five years and the current financial year, the number of staff and the number of ambulances in each case. [30380]

Mr. Richards: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Medical Staff (Suspensions)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *98*, how the notification procedure for consultants suspended over six months applies to those *(a)* already suspended prior to 1 April 1995 and *(b)* suspended after that date. [30409]

Mr. Hague: NHS trusts and health authorities were asked to ensure that the guidance issued on 7 April 1995 is taken into account in drawing up local procedures for handling all suspensions of hospital and community medical and dental staff.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the membership and terms of reference of the Wales ambulance policy advisory group; and if he will make a statement. [30379]

Mr. Richards: The Welsh ambulance policy advisory group was set up by the ambulance trusts themselves. Details may be obtained from the group's current chief executive, Mr. S. Harrhy, chief executive, Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS trust.

Civil Service College

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the director of the Civil Service College concerning departmental participation in courses on devolution; what training courses he has put in place for his staff in preparation for constitutional change; and if he will make a statement. [30435]

Mr. Hague: None.

TREASURY

Value Added Tax

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how Her Majesty's Customs and Excise calculates the risk of businesses not complying with VAT for the purpose of determining which businesses should receive an assurance visit. [29910]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* Customs use statistical methods to evaluate information on businesses and their likelihood to make errors. This provides the relative ranking of each business which is advised to local offices. Staff use this ranking together with local knowledge for the purpose of determining which business should receive an assurance visit.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of *(a)* VAT and *(b)* excise duties that remained uncollected or written off for each of the last five years; and if he will estimate the amount that will be uncollected or written off for the next two years for the same categories. [29911]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* Write-off figures for 1995 have not yet been finalised. The value of VAT remitted or written off in the previous five calendar years was as follows:

1994: £550,464,000
1993: £742,376,00
1992: £745,773,000
1991: £515,335,000
1990: £212,715,000.

Excise write-off figures are consolidated with Customs figures. The value of Customs and other duties written off in the same five years was as follows:

1994: £1,713,000
1993: £2,138,000
1992: £844,000
1991: £733,000
1990: £1,020,000.

The level of write-off in the present and future years is dependent on external factors, such as the rate of insolvency. Customs expect that VAT debt will be contained within 2.3 per cent. of liability for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

EU Preliminary Budget

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals Her Majesty's Government put to the Council of Ministers of the EU with regard to deleting elements of non-compulsory expenditure from the draft preliminary budget for 1995–96. [30168]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's policy is to scrutinise all expenditure, both compulsory and non-compulsory, during the annual EC budgetary process, and to seek reductions where appropriate. This was the case in the preparation of both the 1995 and 1996 Community budgets, as in other years.

Tax Complaints

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in how many cases in each year since 1993 the revenue adjudicator has found *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly in favour of the complainant; and if he will make a statement. [29606]

Mr. Michael Jack: The table provides details of the number of complaints about the Inland Revenue which the adjudicator has upheld wholly, substantially or partially in the three years to 31 March 1996, the figures in parenthesis denoting the proportions of the total number of complaints reviewed during the years concerned:

Year	*Substantially/wholly*		*Partially*	
1993–94	50	48 per cent.	15	14 per cent.
1994–95	98	26 per cent.	95	25 per cent.
1995–96	144	29 per cent.	92	19 per cent.
Total	292	30 per cent.	202	21 per cent.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases have been referred to the revenue adjudicator as complaints arising out of the taxpayers charter in each year since May 1993; and if he will make a statement. [29604]

Mr. Jack: The table shows the number of complaints about the Inland Revenue that the adjudicator received in the three years to 31 March 1996:

Year	*Total received*	*Take up for full investigation*
1993–94	1,615	308
1994–95	2,581	504
1995–96	2,500	470
Total	6,696	1,282

The 5,414 cases which she did not take up for full investigation were mainly ones where the complainant had not first tried to sort out their complaint through the Inland Revenue's own complaints system. In these cases, the adjudicator puts the complainant in touch with the right person in the Inland Revenue; and where necessary helps the complainant clarify the terms of the complaint. The adjudicator calls such cases "assistance cases".

Compliance Cost Assessments

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many compliance cost assessments were produced by his Department in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [25270]

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 17 April 1996, c. 498]:* I regret that the list that I gave inadvertently omitted 15 compliance cost assessments produced by the Building Societies Commission and the Friendly Societies Commission, both of which are responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I apologise to the hon. Member for this oversight. The full list of 30 compliance cost assessments produced by the Chancellor's Departments in 1995 is given in the list. In each case, a copy of the assessment was placed in the Library at the time it was presented to Parliament.

HM Treasury

The Financial Markets and Insolvency (Money Market) Regulations 1995

The Investment Services Directive (EEC/22/93) and the Capital Adequacy Directive (EEC/6/93)

HM Customs and Excise

Approval of Inland Clearance Depots

Landfill Tax

Excise: Two Band Duty Structure for Cider

VAT: Groups (Preliminary Assessment)

VAT: Change to Tour Operators Margin Scheme

VAT: Annual Returns and Annual Payments for Small Businesses Registered for VAT

VAT: Changes to the Payments on Account Scheme for Large VAT Payers

VAT: Implementation of the Second VAT Simplification Directive: Fiscal Warehousing and other Technical Changes

VAT: Extension of the Special Accounting System for Gold

VAT: Credit Notes

Inland Revenue

Reform of the Taxation of Gilts and Bonds

Proposed Changes to the Construction Industry Tax Deduction Scheme: Registration Cards

Gilt Repo Regulations

Building Societies Commission

Building Societies (Liquid Assets) (Amendment) Regulations 1995

Building Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations 1995

Building Societies (Commercial Assets) Order 1995

Building Societies (Aggregation) (Amendment) Rules 1995

Building Societies (Designation of Qualifying Bodies) Order 1995

Building Societies (Provision of Services) Order 1995

Building Societies (Limits on Transactions with Directors) Order 1995

Building Societies (Non-retail Funds and Deposits) (Limit on Election) Order 1995

Building Societies (Mergers) (Amendment) Regulations 1995

Building Societies (Designation of Qualifying Bodies) (No. 2) Order 1995

Building Societies (Liquid Assets) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1995

Building Societies (Accounts and Related Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 1995

Building Societies (Syndicated Lending) Order 1995

Friendly Societies Commission

Friendly Societies (General Charges and Fees) Regulations 1995

Friendly Societies (Activity of a Subsidiary) Order 1995

EU Fraud

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what requests have been made by the Court of Auditors of the European Community to the European Commission to be consulted concerning *(a)* the drafting of any proposed regulation concerned with the expenditure and *(b)* amendments to current regulations in directives aimed at the prevention of irregularities and fraud. [29986]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any correspondence between the Court and the Commission is a matter for the institutions in question.

The European Court of Auditors submitted in May 1995 a report to the "Reflection Group" containing their proposals for treaty changes in the context of the intergovernmental conference. The general position is that in the case of legislative proposals under article 209 the Commission is required to consult the court; in other cases consultation is optional. In its report, the court considered that *(a)* article 209 should be used as the legal basis for all legislation intended to lay down new financial regulations or to derogate from the financial regulation; and *(b)* that as regards optional consultation the court could be systematically consulted on any draft legislation which, on bases other than article 209, affects the Community's budgetary and financial mechanisms, especially regarding control. The intergovernmental conference is considering the court's comments.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans Her Majesty's Government have to avail themselves of each opportunity for officials or their agencies to conduct joint inquiries and activities with officials of the Commission of the European Communities under powers to be provided under the

proposed regulation covering on-the-spot inspections and checks relating to any use of funds provided by the Community. [29987]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This will be an operational matter for the authorities in question. However, my expectation is that UK officials would normally exercise their right to accompany Commission officials.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29433]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* It is not possible to give this information as the Treasury does not distinguish between its suppliers on the basis of their number of employees. The Department's aim is to award contracts which offer the best value for money irrespective of the suppliers' size.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29448]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The information requested is not available as the Treasury does not distinguish between suppliers from the public and private sectors. However the total expenditure of the Department on goods and services during the year in question was £23.7 million.

Procurement Guidelines

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that the central unit for procurement's best practice guidelines cover large lead contractors which sub-contract to small and medium enterprises. [29957]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The central unit on procurement's best practice guidance covers prime contractors and their subcontractors. The provisions apply to all subcontractors, whether large or small.

The contractual relationships between prime contractors and their subcontractors is largely a matter for the contracting parties.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Key Stage 2 Test Papers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what procedures are in place to prevent the improper early opening and misuse of key stage 2 test papers. [29717]

Mr. Paice: Teachers have received clear advice about procedures in the "Key Stage 2 Assessment Arrangements 1996" booklet distributed by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to all participating schools. Headteachers are required to keep the test papers and the separately packaged mark schemes as confidential and stored securely from receipt in school until the day of the particular tests. Early opening of the tests is permissible for pupils with special requirements but specific permission has to be requested for pupils without a statement of special educational needs. In all cases it remains the headteachers' responsibility to ensure that the contents of the test papers are kept confidential.

Special Needs

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities currently include a special educational needs factor in their local management of schools formulae based on a local SEN audit; and what is the comparative value of funds allocated for pupils through such a factor, according to the stage in the code of practice they have reached, for each local education authority for which information is available. [29903]

Mrs. Gillan: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Business Starts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new programmes she is introducing to enable people to start their own business. [29823]

Mr. Paice: The Department will continue to offer considerable help for unemployed people to set up in business through training for work and support for the Prince's Youth business trust.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to institute a comprehensive system for monitoring the achievement levels of pupils according to ethnic origin. [29755]

Mrs. Gillan: As I told the House on 21 November last year, we have introduced and are extending new arrangements to monitor the number of minority ethnic pupils and pupils for whom English is a second language in each maintained school. We also intend to obtain information about the progress of minority ethnic pupils in individual schools, by means of information gathered by Ofsted as part of its regular inspection cycle; and to undertake research as necessary, to look in greater depth at particular issues.

The Dearing review of 16–19 qualifications included a recommendation for work on developing a framework for national monitoring of candidate achievement by ethnic origin, which my right hon. Friend has remitted to the School Curriculum Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications for further study and advice.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each of her Department's agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30112]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Teachers' Pensions Agency market tested its teacher pensions payment services in 1994. Three year contracts beginning in April 1995 were awarded to:

i. The Office of HM Paymaster General (Paymaster Agency)—for the supply of a pensioner payment database;

ii. The Midland Bank plc—for the supply of banking services to support the payment of pensions; and

iii. The TPA itself—for the supply of customer services to answer enquiries from individual pensioners.

Responsibility for the Employment Service has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to rely to your request for details of the Employment Service (ES) market testing programme.

The attached list sets out the ES services so far market tested, and the outcome in each case. Please note that, with the exception of Jobclubs, Employment Rehabilitation Centres and Disability Occupational Psychologists supporting Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams, all entries relate to internal ES corporate support services, rather than external services to clients.

I hope this is helpful.

Employment service market tests

Market test	*Date test completed*
Part 1: Where the work was contracted out	
Travel Service (contract commenced June 1992 for 3 years with extension to March 1996)	May 1992
Materials Management	April 1993
Jobclubs (82 in-house wins 6 contracted out as listed below)	December 1993
Financial Management Training	April 1994
Estates, Maintenance and New Works, Regional Works Consultants (contracts commenced October 1994 for 3 years)	September 1994
Field Training: First Aid Training	September 1994
Field Training: Management and People Development Northern and North West Regions only (other regions in-house wins)	December 1994
Regional Office Support Services Scotland Northern and Wales (other regions in-house wins)	December 1994
Personnel Legal Services	August 1995
Group Welfare	October 1995
Jobclubs (retest) 12 contracted out; 66 in-house wins	December 1995

There are also contracts for Employment Rehabilitation course provision with over 400 organisations nationally. Only two contracts are held centrally these being with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Royal London Society for the Blind. All additional provision is contracted via ES regions. This test was completed in April 1993.

Market test	*Date test completed*
Part 2: In-house wins	
IT Mainframe Services (Accounting System)	July 1992
Security, Messengers and Typing Services (Sheffield Head Office)	December 1993
IT Microcomputer Training (Sheffield Head Office)	December 1993
Jobclubs (see also above) 82 In-house wins; 6 contracted out	December 1993
Management Training	March 1994
Inspection (Fraud) Training	March 1994
Business Consultancy Services	April 1994
Occupational Psychologists	May 1994
Disability Occupational Psychologists supporting Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams and Ability Development Centres	May 1994
Internal Audit	September 1994
London and South East Recruitment Administration	September 1994
Field Training (Procedural)	September 1994
Field Training (Management and People Development) see above; in-house win in seven regions; two regions contracted out	December 1994
Regional Office Support Services see above; in-house win in six regions; two regions contracted out	December 1994
Field Management Services	December 1994
IT Small Systems	February 1995
Jobclubs (retest) 66 in-house wins; 12 contracted out	October 1995

Part 3: Value for money reviews

The following internal services also formed part of the ES Competing for Quality Programme. They were considered for market testing but ultimately it was concluded in each case that a Value for Money Review was the most appropriate and cost effective way forward.

Regional Micro User Support Service

IT Services

Finance Office Payments

Higher Education

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the members of the national committee of inquiry into higher education indicating in the case of those drawn from the business community how many people are employed in the business from which they are drawn. [30124]

Mr. Forth: The members are as listed. In the case of those drawn from the business community, the number of people employed in the business from which they are drawn is shown in brackets.

	Business
Sir Ron Dearing (Chairman)	
Professor John Arbuthnott	Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Strathclyde
Baroness Dean of Thornton le Fylde	(formerly Brenda Dean)
Ms Judith Evans	Director of Corporate Personnel, Sainsbury's (131,298)
Sir Ron Garrick	Managing Director and Chief Executive of Weir Group (6,913)
Sir Geoffrey Holland	Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter
Professor Diana Laurillard	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Technology Development) of the Open University
Mrs. P. A. Morris	Headteacher, The Blue School, Wells
Sir Ronald Oxburgh	Rector of Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
Dr. David Potter	Chairman of Psion plc (491)

	Business
Sir George Quigley	Chairman of Ulster Bank (4,015)
Sir William Stubbs	Chief Executive of the Further Education Funding Council and Rector Designate of the London Institute
Sir Richard Sykes	Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive of Glaxo-Wellcome plc (47,189)
Professor David Watson	Director of the University of Brighton
Professor Sir David Weatherall	Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford
Professor Adrian Webb	Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan
Mr. Simon Wright	Education and Welfare Officer, Students Union, the University of Wales College of Cardiff

Universities and colleges are also employers in their own right.

Medical Students

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women studying in medical schools in England and Wales. [29990]

Mr. Forth: In 1994–95, the numbers of students studying medicine in those universities in England and Wales with medical schools were 14,760 men and 14,961 women.

Feversham College, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received in the current year concerning the granting of voluntary-aided status to Feversham college in Bradford; when her officials *(a)* last met representatives of the college and *(b)* last visited Bradford to meet college representatives; when she expects to take a decision on an application from the college for voluntary-aided status; and if she will make a statement. [30146]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has received no representations in the current years. Officials of the Department met representatives of the college in Bradford on 14 May 1996. There is currently no application for voluntary aided status before my right hon. Friend but she will, of course, consider carefully and on their merits any proposals which come to her for a decision.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30063]

Mr. Forth: The departmental deregulation unit is part of the briefing unit, a division which also has various other functions. The staff who deal with deregulation as part of their duties consist of one grade 5—plus personal secretary—one grade 7, one higher executive officer, one executive officer and one administrative officer. The annual salary and general administrative costs attributable to deregulation functions are approximately £29,000. None of the current staff have been seconded from business. The grade 5 divisional manager has experience of secondment to the private sector.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 15 May, *Official Report*, column *460*, how many firms there are with fewer than 50 employees in each region listed. [30436]

Mr. Paice: Estimates of the numbers of firms of different sizes for the United Kingdom are published in the DTI statistical bulletin "Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Statistics for the UK 1993".

A regional breakdown is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

A copy of the publication is available in the Library.

TRANSPORT

DoA Ltd. (Liabilities)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the continuing funding of DoA Ltd.'s liabilities to Strathclyde passenger transport executive. [30670]

Mr. Watts: My Department has given Strathclyde written assurances that DoA Ltd.'s obligations to the PTE under the deeds of assumption will be met. A minute dated 20 May has been laid before the House.

Drivers' Eyesight Tests

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has now received all replies from the relevant national authorities on eyesight requirements for lorry drivers, required by the second European directive on driving licences. 91/439/EEC; when a final decision will be made; and if he will make a statement. [31417]

Mr. Norris: Information has not yet been received from all national authorities. We are currently considering precisely how the new eyesight requirements should be implemented.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reconsideration has been given to his earlier pronouncement about the abolition from 1 July 1996 of the rights of drivers who under previous United Kingdom regulations had obtained a bus or lorry licence by satisfying the then statutory or administrative eyesight requirements and whose eyesight had not since their last renewal deteriorated below those standards. [30414]

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend announced on 25 April at column *248* that implementation of some of the provisions of the Second EC directive on driving licences, including changes to eyesight requirements for driving lorries and buses, would now take place on 1 January 1997.

Unused Rail Tickets (Refunds)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussion he has had with the Office of the Franchise Director regarding administrative charges by rail franchises for refunding unused rail tickets; what the outcome of those discussions were; what controls have been placed on rail franchisees with respect to administrative charges; and if he will make a statement. [29628]

Mr. Watts: None. Under condition 25 of the national conditions of carriage, train operators are allowed to make a reasonable administrative charge when refunding unused rail tickets.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what power the Rail Regulator has to control the administrative fees charged by rail franchisees when refunding unused rail tickets. [29629]

Mr. Watts: Refund on unused rail tickets are covered by the national conditions of carriage, approved by the Rail Regulator under condition 7 of each operator's passenger licence. The national conditions of carriage allow a reasonable administrative charge to be made. If a train operator was to charge an excessive amount, he could be in breach of his licence obligation and subject to the regulator's enforcement powers.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30065]

Mr. Watts: This Department's deregulation unit has a staff running cost budget of around £100,000 per year and a complement of six staff.

Five are civil servants with little direct experience of the private sector; they include a grade 5, a grade 7, an HEO and two clerical staff—the other is a private sector consultant, who is retained to advise on deregulation issues. The civil servants in the DDU have other responsibilities in addition to the Government's deregulation initiative and this has been taken into account in the budget figure.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report,* column *328,* how many of the bids for Network South Central offered new rolling stock. [30425]

Mr. Watts: This information is commercially confidential.

Road Building

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the network enhancement projects announced in the Highways Agency business plan for 1995–96 were started by 31 March. [29989]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking which network enhancement projects announced in the Highways Agency Business Plan 1995/96 were started by 31 March.

Of the network enhancement projects announced in the Highways Agency's 1995/96 Business Plan, 9 in the £1 million to £3 million category and 156 in the £50,000 to £1 million category were started by 31 March 1996. These projects are those ticked on the attached lists.

The Agency's 1996 Business Plan was amended to include 3 new network enhancement projects in the £50,000 to £1 million category. These were:—

A570 Rainford Bypass, Bushey Lane Bypass, Merseyside

A3 Milford–Thursley Boundless Road, Surrey—Safety Fencing

A10 Buntingford to Royston, Herts—Safety Improvements

All three were started by 31 March 1996.

Major network enhancement project starts.

The following 16 major network enhancement projects costing between £1 million and £3 million 1995–96.

1. A1 Hithchcroft to Cawledge, Northumberland—Upgrading to dual carriageway.
2. A1 Shotton Edge, Northumberland—Junction Improvement.
3. A19 Easington to Hawthorn upgrading, County Durham.
4. M60 Manchester Outer Ring Road, Greater Manchester—Upgrading and Improvement of Signing.
5. A65 Chelker Bends Improvement, North Yorkshire.
6. A616/A628 Flouch Crossroads Improvement, South Yorkshire—Provision of a Roundabout.
7. A30 Kennards House Improvement, Cornwall—Junction Improvement.
8. A39 Fairy Cross to Horns Cross Improvement, Devon.
9. A30 Mienzies Down, Cornwall—Improvement of westbound carriageway.
10. A30 Allins to South Penlean Improvement, Cornwall.
11. A259 Brookland Improvement, Kent.
12. A3 Painshill to Wisley, Surrey—Lighting Improvements.
13. A41 Rosehill to Heath House Improvement, Shropshire.
14. New Traffic Management Schemes, East Midlands—Signing Improvements.
15. M40 Junction 9–10, Oxfordshire—provision of Maintenance Compound.
16. Birmingham—Nottingham—M25—Signing Improvements.

Other network network enhancement project starts

The following 280 network enhancement projects costing between £50,000 and £1 million and shown by region are scheduled to start in 1995–96:

The North East—16 projects totalling £3.5 million

1. A1(M) Sherburn to Bowburn Climbing Lane, Durham.
2. A1 Newcastle Western Bypass—Laybys and Accident Reduction Measures.

3. A1 Metrocentre Gantries, Gateshead.
4. A1 Low Lynn to Haggerston, Northumberland.
5. A19 Hylton Bridge Lighting, Tyne and Wear.
6. A19 Tyne Tunnel Approach—Pedestrian Fencing in Central Reserve near Kirkstone Avenue Footbridge.
7. A19 Kirkstone Avenue, to Hedworth Lane Interchange, Jarrow—Fencing in Central Reserve and Footpath Guardrail.
8. A19 Hedworth Lane Interchange to Field Way, Jarrow—Fencing in Central Reserve.
9. A19/A1231 Junction Signalling, Tyne and Wear.
10. A19A/183 Junction Signalling, Tyne and Wear.
11. A66 Darlington Southern Bypass Dualling.
12. A66 Great Burdon to County Boundary, Durham.
13. A69 Bank Foot Junction Closure, Greenhead, Northumberland.
14. A69 Bank Foot, Hexham—Corbridge Bypass—Upgrading of Layby.
15. A167 Redhills Lane/Toll House, Durham—Junction Signals.
16. A696/A1 to Kenton Bank, Newcastle—Lighting.

The North West—47 projects totalling £10 million

17. M6 Cumbria—Raised Rib Edge Lining.
18. M6 Cumbria—Safety Fencing and Matrix Signals.
19. M6 J28, Lancashire—Lighting.
20. M6 Bridges, Lancashire—Widening of Hardshoulders on Bridges.
21. M6 Brocstedes Bridge Improvement, Lancashire.
22. M6 Shaft Footbridge Replacement, Lancashire.
23. M53 Wirral—Drainage Improvements.
24. M61 Greater Manchester—Southbound Merge with A666—Improvements to Signing and Road Markings.
25. M61 Greater Manchester—Underbridge Lighting Improvements.
26. M62 J12, Greater Manchester—Provision of Link Road.
27. M62 J12, Greater Manchester—Gantry Emergency Route.
28. M62 J18, Roundabout, Greater Manchester—Widening of Circulatory Carriageway.
29. M62 J20, Rochdale—Provision of Free Flow Lane.
30. M62 J20, Greater Manchester—Direction Signing Improvements.
31. M62 J21–J22, Greater Manchester—Drainage Improvements.
32. M63 J9, Greater Manchester—Slip Road Improvement.
33. M63 (J10, 13, 14 and 15), Greater Manchester—Equipment Improvements.
34. M63 J13–J15, Greater Manchester—Provision of Hardstandings.
35. A41 Bell o' the Hill, Cheshire—Bend Improvement.
36. A41 Eastham Rake, Wirral—Traffic Signal Improvement.
37. A41 Hooton Point, Wirral—Traffic Signal Improvement.
38. A49 Greenacres Farm, Cheshire—Bend Improvement.
39. A57 Traffic Signal Improvement, Mottram Moor, Greater Manchester.
40. A57 Greater Manchester—Cycleway Provision.
41. A59/A582 Penwortham Triangle, Preston—Traffic Signal Improvements.
42. A59 Burscough to Rufford, Lancashire—Traffic Calming.
43. A59 B6230 Trafalgar Hotel, Lancashire—New Traffic Signals.
44. A59 Chatburn—Crawler Lane.
45. A59 Chatburn Sawley Bend, Lancashire—Carriageway Realignment.
46. A59 Longsight Road, Lancashire—Traffic Calming.
47. A66 Briery Interchange, Keswick—Provision of Climbing Lane.
48. A556 Plumley Moor Road, Cheshire—Junction Improvement.
49. A556 Lostock Gralam, Cheshire—Carriageway Improvement.
50. A565 Crosby North/South Road, Merseryside—Junction Improvement.
51. A565 Liverpool Road, Crosby—Traffic Signal Improvement.
52. A570/M58 Junction, Lancashire—Improvement and New Laybys.
53. A570 Southport Road, Lancashire—Provision of Laybys.
54. A580 Church Lane, Lowton, Lancashire—Provision of Right Turning Lane.
55. A580 Old Clough Lane, Greater Manchester—Closure of Central Reserve Gap.
56. A585 Skippool Roundabout Improvements, Lancashire.
57. A590 Newby Bridge Improvement, Cumbria.
58. A596 Ramsey Brow and Jane Street, Workington.
59. A646 Burnley Road, Lancashire—Road Marking and Signing Improvements.
60. A5036 Church Road—Netherton Way, Merseyside—Lighting Improvements.
61. A5036/M57/M58 Switch Island Improvement, Merseyside.
62. A5117 (M56–A550), Cheshire—Lighting Scheme.
63. A6119 Whitebirk Roundabout, Blackburn–Signing and Road Marking Improvements.

Yorkshire and Humberside—33 projects totalling £9.3 million

64. M1/M62 Lofthouse Interchange, West Yorkshire—Provision of Turning Lane.
65. M1/M62 Lofthouse Interchange, West Yorkshire—Provision of Turning Lane.
66. M1 J34, Sheffield—Northbound Exit Lane—Provision of Extra Lane.
67. M18/A1(M) Wadworth Interchange, South Yorkshire—Safety Improvements.
68. M62 J29–J30, West Yorkshire—Lighting.
69. M181/A18 Junction, Scunthorpe—Safety Improvements.
70. Humberside Motorways—Verge Safety Fencing.
71. A1(M) Warmsworth—Marr, South Yorkshire—Lighting
72. A15 Central Reserve Safety Fencing.
73. A19 Black Swan Crossroads, North Yorkshire—Lighting.
74. A19 Cross Lanes, North Yorkshire—Carriageway and Junction Improvements.
75. A19 Nether Silton-Over Silton, North Yorkshire—Safety Improvements.
76. A19 New Parks Bends, North Yorkshire—Carriageway Improvements
77. A57 Mansfield Road Junction, South Yorkshire—Provision of Roundabout.
78. A57 Todwick-Anston, South Yorkshire—Lighting.
79. A61 Turnpike Crossroads Improvement, South Yorkshire.
80. A63 Local Central Reserve Safety Fence Improvements in Humberside.
81. A64 Copmanthorpe-Wild Man, North Yorkshire—Safety Improvements.
82. A64 Rillington-Malton, North Yorkshire—Pedestrian and Cycle Facilities.
83. A64 Tadcaster-Wild Man, North Yorkshire—Safety Improvements.

84. A64 West Heslerton, North Yorkshire—Drainage Improvements.

85. A65 Ilkley-Accident Remedial Measures.

86. A180 Humberside—Pollution Chambers to Protect Aquifer.

87. A616 Stocksbridge, South Yorkshire—Safety Fencing.

88. A646 Mytholmroyd, West Yorkshire—Provision of Roundabout.

89. A646 West Yorkshire—Safety Fence Improvements.

90. A650 Aireville-Cottingley Bar, West Yorkshire—Lighting.

91. A660 Otley Chevin, Leeds—Safety Fencing.

92. A1079 Dunnington, North Yorkshire—Traffic Calming.

93. A1079 Hayton, Humberside—Traffic Calming.

94. A1079 Kexby, North Yorkshire—Traffic Calming.

95. A6120 Leeds Outer Ring Road, Weetwood Lane—Traffic Signals.

96. A6120 Ringwood Drive, Leeds—Junction Improvement.

The West Midlands—21 projects totalling £6.3 million

97. M5 J1 and J2, West Midlands—Queue Detection Measures.

98. M6 Midland Links Variable Message Signing Stage 2.

99. M42 J3A J9 and J10, West Midlands—Queue Detection Measures.

100. M50 Hereford and Worcester—Improvements.

101. A5 Fazeley-Two Gates, Staffordshire—Remedial Works.

102. A5 Priorslee-Gailey, Staffordshire—Remedial Works.

103. A34 Aston, Staffordshire—Provision of Footway.

104. A38 Hilliards Cross, Staffordshire—Lighting.

105. A38 Lickey End Widening, West Midlands.

106. A40 Ryeford Diversion, Herefordshire.

107. Closure of Windmill Hill Slip Road, Coventry.

108. A45 Stonehouse Lane Footbridge, West Midlands.

109. A45 Tollbar End Improvements, West Midlands.

110. A49 Belmont Roundabout, Herefordshire—Traffic Signals.

111. A52/A523 Staffordshire—Safety Trial.

112. A435 Warwickshire—Climbing Lane.

113. A449 Halfcot, Staffordshire—Drainage Improvement.

114. A449 Hurcott Road, Kidderminster—Traffic Signals.

115. A452 Chester Road/Little Aston Lane, West Midlands.

116. A458 Rowton Phase 3, Shropshire.

117. A4123 West Midlands.

The East Midlands—24 projects totalling £5.1 million

118. M1J 25, Nottinghamshire—Traffic Signals.

119. M1 J24, Junction Improvement Leicestershire.

120. A1 Five Lanes End Roundabout Improvement, Nottinghamshire.

121. A1 Marksham Moor Roundabout Improvement, Nottinghamshire.

122. A5 Dodwells Roundabout Cycleway, Leicestershire.

123. A5 Nutts Lane Ghost Island, Leicestershire.

124. A6 Accident Reduction Measures, Great Glen, Leicestershire.

125. A6 Barmoor Clough Roundabout, Derbyshire.

126. A6 Darley Dale-Chapel, Derbyshire—Accident Reduction Trials.

127. A14 Layby Improvements, Northants.

128. A16 Boston—Traffic Signals.

129. A16 High Ferry Level Crossing, Lincolnshire—Lighting.

130. A17 Access to Fosdyke Village, Lincolnshire.

131. A46 Stragglethorpe Crossroads Improvement, Nottinghamshire.

132. A47 Allexton-Belton Improvement, Rutland.

133. A47/B6047 Junction near Billesdon, Leicestershire—Lighting.

134. A52 Cropwell Road Junction Improvement, Radcliffe on Trent, Nottinghamshire.

135. A52 Derby-Leek—Accident Reduction Trials.

136. A52 Derby Road/Thoresby Road Junction Improvement, Bramcote, Nottinghamshire.

137. A52 Nottingham Road Junction Improvement, Radcliffe on Trent, Nottinghamshire.

138. A57 Tom Otter's Bridge, Lincolnshire.

139. A61 Unstone-Dronfield, Derbyshire—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.

140. A61/A615 Junction Improvement, Alfreton.

141. A5111 Sinfin Lane, Derbyshire—Junction Improvement.

East Anglia—21 projects totalling £4 million

142. A5 Beeches Road, Dunstable—Traffic Signals.

143. A5 Kelly's Kitchen, Buckinghamshire—Roundabout Improvement.

144. A5/A6 Layby Improvements, Bedfordshire.

145. A10 Harston, Cambridgeshire—Traffic Calming.

146. A11 Chalk Hill, Suffolk—Gap Closure.

147. A11 Worsted Lodge, Cambridgeshire—Rest Area.

148. A12 Hopton, Great Yarmouth—Cycle Track.

149. A12 Hopton, Great Yarmouth—Roundabout.

150. A12 Kessingland Bypass, Suffolk—Roundabout Improvements.

151. A14 Bar Hill-Swavesey, Cambridgeshire—Slip Road and Layby Improvement.

152. A14 Bythorn, Cambridgeshire—Environmental Barrier.

153. A14 Dock Spur, Suffolk—Safety Improvements.

154. A14 Girton-Kentford, Cambridgeshire—Layby Improvement.

155. A14 M11–A1 Cambridgeshire—Safety Fence Improvements.

156. A14 Seven Hills, Suffolk—Provision of extra lane.

157. A47 Dereham Bypass—Laybys.

158. A47 Old Oundle Road, Wittering—Junction Improvement.

159. A47 Plumstead Junction Improvement, Norfolk.

160. A47 Swaffham Roundabout Improvement.

161. A140 Suffolk—B1077/C517—Junction Improvements

162. A428 Northampton-A1—Traffic Calming, Lighting, Cycle Tracks.

London—47 projects totalling £9.8 million

163. Ash Fullers Way North—Junction Improvement.

164. A3 Highfield—Bus Facilities.

165. A3 Putney, Playing Fields Scheme—Gap Closure.

166. A3 South Lane—Bus Facilities.

167. A4 Chiswick Roundabout—Pedestrian/Cycle Facilities and Environmental Improvements.

168. A4 Hatch Lane Junction—Provision of Right Turning Lane.

169. A4 Hogarth Roundabout-Sutton Court Road—Central Reserve and Environmental Improvement.

170. A4 Moor Roundabout—Replacement by Traffic Signals.

171. A4 Oxford Avenue—New Pelican Crossing.

172. A4 Thornby Road Junction—Pedestrian Facilities.

173. A10/A406 Great Cambridge Circus—Accident Remedial Measures.

174. A10 Bullsmore Lane—Junction Improvement.

175. A10 Bury Street—Junction Improvement.

176. A10 Carterhatch Lane-A406—Provision of Cycleway.
177. A12 Mawney Road Footbridge Replacement.
178. A13/A117 Junction—Removal of Tidal Flow.
179. A13 Dagenham and Barking—Environmental Improvements.
180. A20 Sidcup Road, Central Reserve—Environmental and Safety Improvements
181. A23/A205 Junction, Stresthan—Pedestrian Facilities and Right Turning Lane.
182. A23 Streatham—Pelican Crossing, Gap Closures and Landscaping.
183. A30 Clock House Roundabout—Traffic Signals.
184. A40 Provision of Cycle Track.
185. A40 Islip Manor Road Footbridge Replacement.
186. A40 Western Circus-Wood Lane—Central Reserve Concrete Barrier.
187. A41 Finchley Road/Swiss Cottage—Cycle Facilities.
188. A41 Safety Improvement Schemes.
189. A102 Blackwall Tunnel—Height Gauge Northbound.
190. A102 Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach—Safety Fencing.
191. A102 Blackwall Tunnel—Automatic Overheight Detector.
192. A102 Blackwall Tunnel Southern Approach—Safety Fencing.
193. A127 Gallows Corner-Bryant Avenue—Environmental Improvements.
194. A205 Putney—Alignment Improvements.
195. A205 Upper Richmond Road/Oxford Road/Carlton Drive—Traffic Signals.
196. A316 Chalkers Corner—Traffic Flow Improvement.
197. A316 Whitton Road Roundabout—Traffic Signals.
198. A406 Ashley Gardens Footbridge—Addition of Ramps.
199. A501 Euston Road—Traffic and Pedestrian Improvements.
200. A501 Euston Road, Camden Town Hall-Upper Woburn Place—Bus Lane.
201. A501 Euston Underpass—Variable Message Signing.
202. A1400 Woodford Avenue-Clayhall Avenue—Pedestrian Facilities.
203. London-wide enhancement of Closed Circuit TV traffic monitoring.
204. Traffic Enforcement Schemes in London.
205. Installation of improved traffic management systems at six junctions.
206. Installation of 12 Variable Message Signs.
207 Remote Monitoring of Traffic Signals improvements.
208. Speed and Red Light Cameras in London.
209. Urban Traffic Control System Improvements.

The South East—47 projects totalling £7.5 million

210. M1 J6 Hertfordshire—Extra Lane on Northbound Exit.
211. M3 J1 Surrey—Improved Pedestrian Facilities.
212. M3 J6 Blackdam Interchange, Hampshire—Traffic Signals.
213. M4 Berkshire—Additional Safety Fencing.
214. M4 Berkshire—Raised Rib Edge Lining.
215. M11 J4-5, Essex—Provision of 3 Lanes Southbound.
216. M25 J11-J13, Essex—Safety Fence Improvements.
217. M25 J15, Buckinghamshire—Safety Fencing for Lighting Columns.
218. M25 J16, Buckinghamshire—Safety Fencing for Lighting Columns.
219. M25 J24, Hertfordshire—Improvement to Exit Slip roads.
220. A1(M) J3, Hertfordshire—Traffic Signals.
221. A1(M) J6, Hertfordshire—Flood Prevention.
222. A2 Kingston Bridleway Bridge, Kent.
223. A2 Lydden, Kent—Junction Improvement.
224. A2/M25 Junction—Improvements to Traffic Signals.
225. A3/M25 J10 Wisley, Surrey—Improved Traffic Monitoring.
226. A10 Cheshunt, Hertfordshire—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.
227. A12 Feering-Marks Tey, Essex—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.
228. A12 Hatfield Peverel-Marks Tey Essex—Safety Measures.
229. A12 Witham–Hatfield Peverel, Essex—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.
230. A21 Sevenoaks Bypass—Safety Improvements.
231. A23 Pease Pottage-Handcross, West Sussex—Improved Signs and Lane Markings.
232. A23 Warninglid-Brighton—Improved Signs and Lane Markings.
233. A27 Avisford-Tortington, West Sussex—Safety Improvements.
234. A27 Bognor Roundabout—Pedestrian/Cycle Bridge.
235. A27 Lancing, West Sussex—Drainage Improvement.
236. A27 Ripe Junction Improvement, East Sussex.
237. A27 Sussex University Junction Improvement, Brighton.
238. A30 The Billet, Staines—Overheight Detector Upgrade.
239. A30 The Billet, Staines—Traffic Signals.
240. A30 Staines-Ashford—Improved to Signs and Lane Markings.
241. A31 Cadnam-Stoney Cross, Hampshire—Safety Improvements.
242. A31 Stoney Cross-Picket Post, Hampshire—Safety Improvements.
243. A40/B4425 Junction Improvement, Burford, Oxon.
244. A40 London Road, Headington, Oxon—Traffic Signals.
245. A41 North of Dome Roundabout, Hertfordshire—Parking Improvement.
246. A259 Nicholls Quarry, Kent—Junction Improvement.
247. A259 New Beach Junction Improvement, Kent.
248. A259 Redoubt Way Junction Improvement, Kent.
249. A282/M25 Dartford Crossing—Variable Message Signing.
250. A282/M25 Essex—Variable Message Signing Gantry.
251. A420 Buckland Junction Improvement, Oxon.
252. A420 Hartwells/Rockley Cottages, Oxon—Junction Improvement.
253. A420 Longcot Turn, Oxon—Junction Improvement.
254. A420 Pusey Turn, Oxon—Junction Improvement.
255. A420/A338 Junction Improvement, Oxon.
256. Hertfordshire—Improvements to Communications Equipment.

The South West—24 projects totalling £5.8 million

257. M4 Wiltshire—Emergency Gap Closure Advance Works.
258. M4 J15, Wiltshire—Traffic Signals.
259. M4/M32 Junction Improvement Phase 2, Avon.
260. M5 Devon—Railway Safety Fencing.
261. M5 Somerset—Safety Fencing.
262. A4 Saltford Safety Schemes, Avon.
263. A30 Bodmin Bypass—Layby Improvements.

264. A30 Monkton, Devon—Provision of Footbridge.

265. A30 Temple Junction Improvement, Cornwall.

266. A31 St. Leonards Footbridge, Dorset.

267. A31/A35 Dorset—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.

268. A35 Fulvens, Dorset—Edge Support and Safety Fencing.

269. A35 Whiteway Cross, Dorset—Junction Improvement.

270. A36/A27 Junction, Wiltshire—Traffic Signals and Lighting.

271. A36 College Roundabout, Wiltshire—Traffic Signals.

272. A36 Wick Farm Improvement, Somerset.

273. A38 Landrake Footbridge, Cornwall.

274. A39 Bangors Improvement, Cornwall.

275. A39 Collans Cross-Starra Peak, Cornwall.

276. A40/A48/A417 Gloustershire—Speed Camera Facilities.

277. A361 Devon—Central Reserve Safety Fencing.

278. A361 Little Gornhay, Devon—Flood Relief.

279. A361 Moortown Junction Improvement, Devon.

280. A417 Birdlip, Gloucestership—Signal Lane Dualling.

Thames Leisure Craft Operators

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what training and qualifications are required of masters of passenger pleasure and leisure craft on the River Thames. [29541]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the training and qualifications required for masters of passenger, pleasure and leisure craft on the River Thames.

Masters of vessels on the River Thames which carry more than 12 passengers must be qualified in accordance with the Merchant Shipping (Local Passenger Vessels) (Masters' Licences and Hours, Manning and Training) Regulations 1993. The 1993 regulations require masters to hold a current Boatmaster's Licence which is appropriate to the waters in which their vessel is being navigated and the number of passengers being carried. The training requirements which must be satisfied before the licence is issued are described in Merchant Shipping Notice M. 1525. I enclose copies of the 1993 regulations and M.1525 with this letter.

Exemptions from the requirement to hold a Boatmaster's Licence can be granted where the master holds a qualification the standards for which are considered at least equivalent to the Department's standards for the relevant grade of Boatmaster's Licence. The Port of London Authority's (PLA) Waterman's Licence is recognised as equivalent to the MSA's Boatmaster's Licence for masters of vessels on the River Thames which carry more than 12 passengers. To obtain such a licence a master has to pass four independent professional examinations before achieving a full licence. Thereafter, they are required to maintain its validity by working on the river for 150 days every 3 years. Anyone failing to meet this experience criterion has to be re-examined.

Masters of vessels on the River Thames carrying 12 passengers or fewer are required by the PLA to hold the PLA Waterman's Licence.

Airport Development

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *542*, what is the time scale of each of the detailed assessments listed. [29570]

Mr. Norris: Detailed assessments of Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton were carried out by the RUCATSE working group as it judged only these airports offered worthwhile prospects of responding to forecast levels of demand. The group took the view that Southampton, Manston and Lydd did not merit detailed assessments. RUCATSE's report was published in July 1993.

King's Cross Railway Lands (Gasholders)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to relocate the gasholders on the King's cross railway lands. [30356]

Mr. Watts: Union Railways and London and Continental Railways, who will be responsible for designing and constructing the channel tunnel rail link, are consulting English Heritage about the priority which should be afforded to the gasholders among other St. Pancras heritage projects.

Driving Licences

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what opinion surveys were commissioned by his Department to test public support for plastic photocard driving licences; and what were the results. [29984]

Mr. Norris: A preliminary public consultation during 1991 showed strong support for including photographs on driving licences. Subsequent public consultation in 1994 confirmed the earlier support.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his Department's press notice of 10 April, Reference 110, how he measures the benefits in terms of establishing identity from the introduction of plastic photocard driving licences. [29982]

Mr. Norris: Introduction of plastic photocard licences will, among other benefits, reduce the possibility that lost or stolen licences may be used to support a false identity—for example, when taking a driving test or hiring a vehicle.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact on the levels of fraud of the introduction of plastic photocard driving licences. [29983]

Mr. Norris: We intend to introduce stringent checking procedures which will make it extremely difficult to obtain a photocard driving licence fraudulently. The card format will incorporate a number of security features designed to prevent counterfeiting.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his plans to increase the reliability of identification procedures for the issuing of driving licences; whether these plans involve the taking of fingerprints or any other biometric measures; if access to personal data held by the Government Departments is involved; and what additional data items, not related to driving licences, are being considered to be included in

space on the licence allocated to member states for their own purposes. [30048]

Mr. Norris: The checks on the identity of applicants for photocard driving licences are being considered in the light of the best practices of the Passport Agency. These do not include fingerprints or biometric measures.

Access to personal information will be regulated under the provision of the Data Protection Act.

EU legislation allows member states to include additional information on the driving licence and designates an area on the licence for that purpose. No decision has yet been made on what it will contain.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Colliery Areas Regeneration

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total allocation of the RECHAR funds over the last three years *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Wales. [29465]

Mr. Oppenheim: The United Kingdom allocation for 1990–93 was 179.0 mecu, in 1992 prices of which 31.2 mecu was for Wales. The UK allocation for 1994–97 is at present 163.24 mecu, in 1995 prices, of which 20.46 mecu was for Wales. These figures reflect the preponderantly earlier incidence of job losses in the Welsh coal industry.

Radiocommunications Agency

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the areas under consideration for contracting out in the Radiocommunications Agency indicating the number of staff involved and the proposed time-scale involved; and if he will make a statement. [29376]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Radiocommunications Agency and its predecessors has an excellent record for contracting out services. Licensing which does not involve frequency assignment has been contracted out; in other areas they have encouraged self management by industry groups wherever possible where this improves customer service. It is agency policy to review continuously all licensing activities to identify any potential candidates for future action. The support services of the agency were all contracted out on relocation to new headquarters in London's docklands last October.

The Radiocommunications Agency is also currently completing its prior options review, which is examining, among other things, the scope for any further contracting out across the agency. Ministers announced the outcome of the review of the customer services branch on 31 October 1995. It is anticipated that the review of the remainder of the agency will be completed within the next few months.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the terms of reference for the proposed strategic partnership between the Radiocommunications Agency information technology service and the private sector; how many staff are involved; and what are the estimated costs; [29378]

(2) if he will list *(a)* those parties which responded to the advertisement in the EC *Journal* with regard to the strategic partnership between the Radiocommunications Agency information technology service and the private sector, *(b)* the date for proposed tendering, *(c)* the mechanisms for union involvement in the consultation process and *(d)* the number of union representatives to sit on the bids evaluation panel; and if he will make a statement; [29380]

(3) when a new contractor will be selected to complete refurbishment of New Kings Beam house; if he will make a statement on the process for evaluating new bids and the criteria for selecting a new contractor; who will sit on the evaluation panel; if unions will be permitted to participate in the selection process; and if he will make a statement; [29382]

(4) how many consultants have been employed in the Radiocommunications Agency to date; at what cost; and if he will make a statement; [29377]

(5) if he will make a statement on the procedures employed by his Department to monitor outfitting and refurbishment work in New Kings Beam house prior to the contractor going into receivership; what is the cost of unfinished work; and if he will make a statement; [29381]

(6) if he will make a statement on the future location of staff in the Radiocommunications Agency. [29379]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the chief executive of the Radiocommunications Agency. I have asked him to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1996:

As promised in Mr Taylor's response to your Parliamentary Question No. 97/2277 I am writing to you to provide the information you requested about our procurement of an IT Strategic Partner.

(a) The Agency is using EC Services Directive negotiated procedures to recruit an IT Strategic Partner from the private sector. The detailed terms of reference for the partnership will be agreed later this year in negotiations with the short listed companies. It is the Agency's intention to acquire a partner who can work with the Agency to provide a broad range of information technology services which fully meet the Agency's business needs and provide value for money. It also sees opportunities for the partnership to exploit the Agency's expertise in spectrum management in international markets, benefiting the UK industrial and diplomatic interests, subject to ministerial approval.

(b) Some 45 Agency staff are currently directly involved in IT. We have made clear to all staff that, subject to discussion with line management, they will be able to apply for redeployment work in the Agency's Intelligent Customer Function, to apply for other work within the Agency or to transfer to the chosen 'Strategic Partner'.

(c) It is estimated that the external cost of setting up the Partnership will be some £300k, for the use of CCTA consultancy, and that the annual value of the contract will be some £2.5m to £3m over 7 to 10 years.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1996:

As promised in Mr Taylor's response to your Parliamentary Question No. 95/2279 I am writing to you to provide the information you requested about our procurement of an IT Strategic Partner.

(a) The attached annex provides a list of the companies who responded to the advert in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

(b) It is expected that final tenders will invited from a short list of three or four companies during February 1997.

(c) The Agency Trade Union Side is being kept informed about progress at our regular Whitley Council meetings. Additionally the Agency is establishing an IT Staff Consultative Group which will be regularly consulted during the development of the Agency's partnership requirements and when negotiations with the short listed companies are progressing.

(d) Although the Agency's Management Board will take the final decision on the selection of the Partner , the Trade Union Side will be kept in touch with developments.

RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS AGENCY
IT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROJECT
List of companies responding to the OJEC Advert

Netpoint
Pyramid Technology Ltd.
Prolog Systems Ltd.
Triad Group Ltd.
Admiral Management Services Ltd.
Elan Communications
Electric Data Systems Ltd.
Shiva Europe Ltd.
Sherwood Computer Services Group Ltd.
Real Time Maintenance
Hoskyns Group plc
Origin Data Realisation Ltd.
Anthony Cook Associates
SAIC Ltd.
Coda Ltd.
Kalamazoo Computer Group plc
CFM Group Ltd.
P and I Data Services Ltd.
Mackenzie Tribbeck Associates (Computer Consultants) Ltd.
Cril Ingenierie Groupe Coritec
Aegis Systems Ltd.
CMG Computer Management Group (UK) Ltd.
IT Counsel Ltd.
Amdahl (UK) Ltd.
IBM (UK) Ltd.
Data Sciences UK Ltd.
Sema Group UK Ltd.
ITnet Ltd.
Logica UK Ltd.
Deloitte and Touche Consulting Group
CSC Computer Services Ltd.
PA Consulting Group
ICL Enterprises Ltd.
Syntegra
Sequent Computer Systems Ltd.
BMC Software Ltd.
ASE Consulting
Systems Express Ltd.
VEGA Group plc
Kept for summary file
BT Sales
Unisys
Redifon Mel Ltd.
FI Group plc
WS Atkins Consultants Ltd.
Parity Solutions Ltd.
Cray Systems Ltd.
Mason Communications
Easams Ltd.
National Telecommunications Ltd.
DSSD
Integris UK (division of Bull Information Systems)
Data General Ltd.
Targetfour Ltd.
Origin/C and P UK

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the employment of consultants in my Agency.

This Agency did not assume responsibility for letting its own contracts until 1994. During the financial year 1994/95 contracts for external consultancy were let to 6 organisations at a cost of £238,000. During 1995/96 8 consultancy firms were engaged at a cost of £256,000. Because of the nature of this work there is some overlap of contracts between the years and therefore some double counting of the numbers of firms engaged.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question concerning procedures for monitoring refurbishment work at New King's Beam House.

A project manager was employed to monitor the project. Formal weekly meetings were held on site and were attended by the RA's project sponsors. They also inspected the site and discussed all aspects of the project with the project managers and other professionals on a daily basis. Cost information is a commercial matter between the parties.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the selection of contractors for the refurbishment of New King's Beam House.

A new contractor has been selected. Departmental procurement procedures were followed throughout. Trade Union participation in the selection process is not part of those procedures and they were not invited to participate.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 21 May 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question concerning the further location of staff in the Radiocommunications Agency.

The Headquarters staff of the Radiocommunications Agency are currently located at New King's Beam House and will remain there until South Quay 3 in Docklands is ready for reoccupation.

Trade Associations

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to encourage the merger of trade, industry and employer associations and federations into more representative bodies. [29658]

Mr. Page: My colleagues and I are continuing to meet with trade associations and other representative bodies to encourage them to become more fully representative of whole sectors, in line with the principles in my Department's best practice guide for the Model Trade Association.

Encryption Algorithms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to restrict the use of encryption algorithms to protect the activities of the law enforcement agencies. [29696]

Mr. Ian Taylor: There are no plans to introduce measures which would restrict the use of encryption algorithms. As I have made clear in previous answers, however, discussions have been taking place between Government Departments on the type of arrangements

that could be introduced to provide encryption services for business whilst preserving the effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies. No decisions have yet been taken.

We are watching closely developments in the USA and the impact they may have on commercial interests in the United Kingdom.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Watson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much has been spent on providing briefing material to members of industrial tribunals in each of the last five years; and what is his estimate of the amount likely to be spent during the current year; [29937]

(2) what change has been made in the amount of briefing material made available to industrial tribunal members; and if he will make a statement; [29936]

(3) what consultations he has had with industrial tribunal members about the type and quantity of briefing material they want to have provided by the Department. [29938]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Regular briefing is provided for members through the Incomes Data Services brief. The annual costs of this publication for the last five years and the current year is:

Year
1991: £71.8k
1992: £77.4k
1993: £100.1k
1994: £101.6k
1995: £102.1k
1996: £80.7k

These figures include the cost of providing this publication to tribunal chairmen as well as members. It is not possible to identify separately the cost for the lay members. Additional briefing material is provided to members as part of their initial and annual refresher training.

The instrument of appointment for lay members provides for up to three days initial induction training, plus up to two refresher days general training each year.

There has been no change to the range of briefing material made available to members, although in the interests of good financial management, there has been a reduction in the total number of copies of the IDS brief. This reduction in the number of copies was the subject of full consultation with the president of the tribunals and the regional chairmen.

Sun Alliance-Royal Insurance Merger

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what ways he proposes to ensure that the public interest, with particular reference to the consequences for public finances of the effects on employment, are taken into account during consideration of the proposed Sun Alliance-Royal Insurance merger. [29730]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This merger does not fall to be considered under the public interest test in the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act, as it comes within the jurisdiction of the EC merger regulation. Under this legislation, the EC Commission is responsible for appraising the merger's impact on competition, taking into account the views of member states.

Bread Pricing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer to the Office of Fair Trading the subject of predatory pricing of bread by supermarkets. [29760]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Director General of Fair Trading is currently considering the impact of the pricing policies that are pursued by supermarkets, including allegations of predatory pricing of bread, and is taking the opportunity to review a wide range of competition issues in relation to supermarkets. He will decide in due course whether there are any grounds for him to take action. If anyone has firm evidence that supermarkets may be breaching competition law they should bring it to the attention of the DGFT.

Council of Europe (Meetings)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29369]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* There have been 212 meetings of or organised by the Council of Europe since January 1995 attended by members of staff of the UK delegation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. DTI officials do not routinely attend.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30129]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Services within my Department's agencies which have been market tested with an in-house bid are as follows:

National Weights and Measures Laboratory:

Typing services: Awarded to in-house team

Patent Office:

Reprographic services: Awarded to in-house team

The Insolvency Service:

Central Accounting Unit: Awarded to in-house team

Crown Post Offices

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Crown post offices in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* throughout the United Kingdom have been converted to agency status in each financial year since the introduction of the policy. [29988]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand from the Post Office that numbers of crown post offices converted to agency

status in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom in each financial year since 1989–90 are as follows:

Year	*Scotland*	*United Kingdom*
1989–90	32	153
1990–91	29	164
1991–92	40	147
1992–93	11	108
1993–94	13	117
1994–95	11	106
1995–96	2	45

Statutory Employment Rights

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the proportion of full-time workers qualifying for statutory employment rights in *(a)* 1978, *(b)* 1988, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1993 and *(e)* 1994 in the United Kingdom and in each standard region and nation. [30405]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The requested estimates cannot be provided, for a number of reasons. These include the fact that not all employment rights have the same qualifying conditions, and that the rights themselves have been amended over the years so that no direct comparisons can be made. Employees now qualify for a number of important rights regardless of their hours of work or length of service.

Advertising Standards Authority

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what measures he takes to ensure that the decisions of the Advertising Standards Authority reflect public concerns on matters of taste and decency; [30194]

(2) what monitoring he routinely undertakes of the Advertising Standards Authority. [30198]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Advertising Standards Authority is independent of Government. It supervises an agreed code of practice under which the advertising industry is self-regulated to ensure that the system works in the pubic interest and to publicly acceptable standards.

The authority assesses advertisements according to the standards of taste and decency generally accepted at present in the United Kingdom. The authority will be conducting research into current public attitudes on taste and decency during this year.

My Department maintains regular contact with the authority, raising with it matters of concern as considered necessary.

Employment Rights

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to extend the protection of employment rights for those at work. [30304.]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have no plans at present.

Computerisation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's involvement in the development of a software package to allow PAYE/NICS/VAT/CSO requirements to be integrated. [29953]

Mr. Page: DTI is not involved directly. The feasibility of a computer based package is being considered jointly by the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency.

"Your Business Matters" Conference

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date he plans to publish the Government's responses to the "Your Business Matters" conference. [29956]

Mr. Page: A comprehensive response to the "Your Business Matters" conferences and subsequent report, will be published alongside the third "Competitiveness" White Paper in June.

Company Payment Practice

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he plans to publish the consultative document on reporting of payment practice in company accounts; [29947]

(2) what the deadline will be for responses to consultation on reporting of payment practice in company accounts. [29946]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department intends to publish a consultative document on reporting of payment practice at the end of June. In accordance with standard practice, consultees will have three months to respond.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30059]

Mr. Oppenheim: The running costs for the departmental deregulation unit for 1996–97 are approximately £150,000. It has a core staff of three private civil servants—one G7 and two HEO grade—one of whom has experience of the private sector. In addition the DDU draws upon a variety of other departmental resources, including the expertise of business secondees to the Department.

Science, Engineering and Technology

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to publish the 1996 "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology". [30642]

Mr. Lang: The 1996 "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology", and its companion volume, "Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics 1996", were laid in the House this morning. This year, in response to a recommendation of the Science and Technology Committee, I have presented the documents as Command Papers. This will increase their accessibility to Members of both Houses.

This is the third such annual publication. The "Forward Look" reiterates the Government's commitment to the White Paper policies set out in "Realising Our Potential".

It describes the Government's strategy for publicly funded science, engineering and technology (SET) within a framework of five broad objectives:

- to develop publicly funded SET to meet the country's future needs, taking account of 'Technology Foresight', and fostering partnership between the science and engineering base, industry and Government.
- to maintain the excellence of UK science, engineering and technology, to advance knowledge, increase understanding and produce highly educated and trained people.
- to improve public awareness and understanding of SET
- to maximise the effectiveness of our EU and international collaboration in meeting UK objectives
- to promote collaboration between Government Departments and ensure that trans-departmental SET issues are handled effectively, while improving efficiency and value for money.

The "Forward Look" also presents future SET expenditure plans, includes statements by individual departments and research councils on their programmes, and reports progress on implementing the 1993 White Paper.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has carried out into the ease with which small employers can identify the documents required under clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [29949]

Mr. Page: No research in this ares has been carried out by my Department. I understand that the Home Office asked respondents to its consultation document on the prevention of illegal working to comment on this matter.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations his Department has received from businesses about the cost and burden of implementing clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; what percentage was in favour; and what percentage was against the clause. [29962]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* This Department has received no such representations.

Research Councils

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions the Minister for Science and Technology has met collectively *(a)* the chief executives of the research councils and *(b)* the chairmen of research councils, and on what dates. [29001]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* I met collectively the chief executives of the research councils on 13 December 1995 and the chairmen on 20 February 1996. In addition I have met individual research council chairmen or chief executives on several occasions before and since these meetings.

Company Collapses

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take following the collapse of Homepower Ltd. and Power Store Trading Ltd. [29258]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* None. The administrators are seeking to preserve as much of the business and jobs of these companies as possible. They are reviewing the financial and trading prospects of the business and the individual stores with a view to a sale as a going concern.

Company Annual Accounts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what provisions he has made for extension for the filing of annual accounts by Firland's Training of Aylesbury; [29385]

(2) how many special provisions he has granted to companies to postpone filing their annual accounts beyond the penalty date; in what circumstances; and if he will make a statement. [29384]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answers 14 May 1996]:* The registrar and chief executive of Companies House executive agency has delegated authority to deal with such matters on behalf of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The registrar has been asked to write to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Letter from John S. Holden to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 21 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions regarding the number of special provisions granted to companies to postpone filing their annual accounts beyond the penalty date and in what circumstances, and the provisions made for extension of the filing of annual accounts by Firlands Training of Aylesbury.

Information on the number of extensions granted each year appear in the Department's Annual Report to Parliament. For your convenience, the numbers are as follows:

1993/94: 4,910

1994/95: 6,610

1995/96: 6,708

Extensions to the time allowed for delivering accounts are granted by Companies House on a discretionary basis on behalf of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. They are granted in exceptional circumstances where there are "special reasons" that are unforeseen by the company and which are beyond the control of its officers. There is no comprehensive or prescribed list of acceptable reasons, since each case is considered on its merits.

With regard to the matter of Firlands Training Limited, it is not our policy to disclose to third parties the reasons for individual discretionary decisions. These are matters between the Department and the company concerned.

However, I can confirm that as my officials have been satisfied as to the existence of "special circumstances", this company has been granted an extension of 3 months to the period allowed for delivering its 30 April 1995 accounts. The accounts are now due to be delivered no later than 31 May 1996; the company's public record has been noted accordingly.

Torture Equipment

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to reply to the letter about the export of torture equipment by British companies about which the hon. Member for Stretford wrote to the Prime Minister on 20 March. [29177]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* This related to a matter which aroused public interest and

which needed careful consideration, and inquiries made, before responding. I wrote to the hon. Member on 16 May 1996.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29425]

Mr. John. M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* My Department follows the advice issued by the central unit on procurement in its guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

The guidance note makes clear that bonds are not always necessary and are not a substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor.

The other information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29435]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29450]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Scottish and Newcastle Breweries

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, (1) pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *330*, how many of the 23 separate letters or parliamentary questions relating to Scottish and Newcastle Breweries were in letter form; [30169]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *330*, which hon. Members have written to him on matters relating to Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. [30170]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Fifteen separate letters and eight separate parliamentary questions were answered. It is not the practice to release details of correspondence between hon. Members and Ministers.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times BSE infection has been found in cattle being imported into the United Kingdom; and from which countries the infected cattle originated. [28852]

Mr. Ancram: I understand that 14 animals have been imported into the UK which have been subsequently confirmed as having BSE. Although exact dates of importation are not known, the animals are believed to have resided in the UK for a sufficient period to have been exposed to BSE infective material. It cannot be concluded that the animals were affected with BSE when imported.

The countries from which the animals were imported are as follows:

Belgium: 1

France: 4

Italy: 3

Netherlands: 1

Republic of Ireland: 5.

Environmental Improvement Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which location environmental improvement schemes have been completed; which schemes are presently under construction; what funds have been allocated for such schemes in each of the next three years; what proposals there are for an environmental improvement scheme at Killyleagh; and if he will make a statement. [29874]

Mr. Moss: The following lists set out the locations where environmental improvement schemes are under construction. For each of the next three financial years, £2.7 million has been programmed by the Department of the Environment for environmental improvement schemes.

A scheme has been identified at High street, Castle place, Killyleagh, to link with a roads scheme. At present, it is programmed for 1998–99 at a cost of £200,000 approximately.

LOCATION WHERE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES HAVE BEEN COMPLETED—1 APRIL 1993 TO 31 MARCH 1996

Ballymena

Dungannon

Magherafelt

Carrickfergus

Antrim

Armagh

Dromore

Loughgall

Newry

Markethill

Portrush
Ballymoney
Enniskillen
Strabane
Downpatrick
Ballynahinch
Donaghadee
Lisburn
Bangor
Holywood
Draperstown
Carnlough
Keady
Hilltown
Cullyhanna
Newtownhamilton
Cushendall
Belleek
Derrygonnelly
Garrison
Belcoo
Castlederg
Coalisland
Carrickmore
Newtownstewart
Stewartstown
Cushendall
Londonderry
Belfast
Newtownabbey
Edenderry
Newtownards
Strangford
Killough
Bryansford
Dunmurry
Castlewellan
Portaferry
Castlereagh

LOCATION WHERE SCHEMES ARE PRESENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Coleraine
Antrim
Draperstown
Lurgan
Portadown
Richhill
Omagh
Coagh
Clogher
Drumquin
Irvinestown
Trillick
Londonderry
Belfast.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30069]

Mr. Ancram: The annual budget for 1995–96 for the Department of Economic Development's deregulation unit, which co-ordinates the deregulatory activity of Northern Ireland Departments was £154,065. The budget provides for the following career civil servants, none of whom have private sector experience:

1 grade 5 (part-input)
1 grade 7 (part-input)
1 deputy principal
2 staff officers
1 administration officer
1 typist (part-input).

The unit does not have any secondees from business.

Teilifis na Gaeilge

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what meetings he has had with Teilifis na Gaeilge; and if he will make a statement. [29973]

Mr. Ancram: There have been no meetings between Northern Ireland Office Ministers and Teilifis na Gaeilge.

Departmental Employees

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by grade the number of women employed in each Government Department of the Northern Ireland Office. [30495]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is in the table:

	DFP	*DENI*	*DED*	*DOE*	*DANI*	*DHSS*	*NIO*
Senior Civil Service	5	3	2	1	—	8	2
Grade 6	12	15	2	3	1	7	21
Grade 7	12	6	20	15	45	19	16
Deputy Principal	37	13	42	61	42	47	50
Staff Officer	73	31	79	134	101	132	75
Executive Officer I	55	26	232	156	76	300	72
Executive Officer II	89	64	206	293	142	947	117
Admin Officer	317	122	419	1,020	341	2,223	308
Admin Assistant	112	39	164	422	291	721	177
Other	2	—	1	—	2	—	7
Totals	714	319	1,167	2,105	1,041	4,404	845

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which *(a)* universities and *(b)* further education colleges (i) he and (ii) his Ministers have visited since assuming office; when these visits took place; and what further plans he and his Ministers have to visit universities and further education colleges in the next two months. [25191]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 16 April 1996]:* Since July last year, Scottish Office Ministers have undertaken engagements in the following further and higher education institutions:

	Date of visit
Secretary of State	
University of Strathclyde	30 November 1995
University of Strathclyde	13 January 1996
University of Stirling	26 April 1996
Minister of State	
University of Edinburgh	10 July 1995
Heriot-Watt University	8 September 1995
Mr. Robertson	
University of Stirling	4 August 1995
Banff and Buchan College	21 August 1995
Cardonald College	5 September 1995
Fife College	2 October 1995
Aberdeen College	6 October 1995
Heriot-Watt University	6 November 1996
University of Strathclyde	13 November 1995
University of Strathclyde	24 November 1995
Anniesland College	4 December 1995
Perth College	2 February 1996
Dundee College	26 February 1996
Mr. Kynoch	
Cardonald College	14 December 1995
University of Aberdeen	17 April 1996
Earl of Lindsay	
Heriot-Watt University	5 September 1995
Moray House Institute of Education	19 September 1995
University of Aberdeen	12 October 1995
University of Stirling	14 February 1996
Scottish Agricultural College	1 March 1996
Napier University	2 May 1996

Engagements are also planned, or being planned, for the following further and higher education institutions:

Mr. Robertson

Glasgow School of Art: 31 May 1996

Langside College: 31 May 1996

John Wheatley College: 31 May 1996

Queen Margaret College: 18 October 1996

University of Abertay Dundee:

University of Edinburgh:

Edinburgh College of Art:

Glasgow Caledonian University:

Moray House Institute of Education:

The Open University:

The Robert Gordon University:

St. Andrew's College of Education:

Mr. Kynoch

University of Strathclyde: 11 June 1996

Earl of Lindsay

Elmwood College:

Ministerial Advisers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the annual costs of the *(a)* salaries, *(b)* secretarial support and *(c)* accommodation and travelling expenses for his two advisers; and if he will make a statement. [25490]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 April 1996]:* I refer the hon Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Brown) on 18 December 1995 *Official Report*, column *818*. The salary levels have increased by 2.7 per cent. since that reply.

Secretarial support is provided by one secretary in London and one in Edinburgh. It is not our practice to divulge individual salaries, but the average cost of a personal secretary in the Scottish Office is £17,247—salary plus national insurance plus superannuation.

Accommodation costs are not separately identified as they form part of the overall Scottish Office charges.

The annual travel and subsistence charge for a special adviser is estimated at £9,000.

Health Care International

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Scottish Office expenditure *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at current prices on (i) the Health Care International hospital in Clydebank and (ii) developing the land. [25421]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 16 April 1996]:* The Scottish Office itself paid £18.6 million in regional selective assistance—of which £1 million was subsequently recovered—to Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd (HCI). The company also, however, received other support from public funds. In addition, the Scottish Development Agency and Scottish Enterprise incurred expenditure on physical works not specific to HCI to render the relevant site safe and capable of development as part of the Clydebank enterprise zone.

The financial support from pubic sources to HCI, and the expenditure on physical works not specific to HCI, were set out in cash terms in appendix 5 of the memorandum of the Comptroller and Auditor General annexed to the report of the Committee of Pubic Accounts on Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd (HMSO, House of Commons paper 32). The information is reproduced in the table, together with recalculations of the expenditure concerned to March 1996 prices. For a few items expenditure took place over a period of months and is not readily attributable to a single month: in these cases the recalculation to March 1996 prices has been based on the average price for the period concerned.

Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd.
Financial Support from public sources

Direct Support	£	*Month disbursed*	*£ (at March 1996 prices)*
(i) Shares			
Class A Ordinary Shares bought from Scottish Enterprise	500	July 1991	566
Class A Preference shares bought by Scottish Development Agency converted from development loan advanced 1987	50,000	October 198773,615	
Scottish Development Agency: release towards consultants' fees	1,285,302	January 1988–July 1991	1,640,016
Scottish Enterprise: final purchase July 1991	64,698	July 1991	73,257
GE Capital position taken over by Scottish Enterprise			
Ordinary Shares	1,107	{ £3 million, March 1992	1,227
Preference Shares	5,500,000	{ £2.501 million, April 1992	6,003,242
Interest and Fees	503,804	August 1993	540,172
Less: Disposal to British Aerospace plc	(5,501,107)	(August 1993)	(5,898,215)
(ii) Loans and Grant			
LEG-UP Loan (Scottish Development Agency/Scottish Enterprise)	4,000,000	March 1994	4,252,632
Regional Selective Assistance Grant (Scottish office Industry Department)	18.600,000	[1][December 1991 to September 1994]	20,101,449
(iii) Physical Works–Specific to HCI			
Value of Land	900,000	July 1991	1,010,058
Scottish Enterprise Contribution	500,000	March 1992	554,133
Dunbartonshire Enterprise Contribution	1,600,000	October 1991–March 1992	1,784,540
(iv) Other Support			
Dunbartonshire Enterprise Training and part running costs Healthcare Liaison Office	108,500	[from financial year 1992–1993 to financial year 1994–1995: not readily attributable to particular dates]115,775	
Total direct support	27,612,804		£30,261,467
Physical Works not Specific to HCI			
Scottish Development Agency: Site Works	6,700,000	February 1988–December 1989	9,113,538
Scottish Enterprise: Additional Asbestos and Methane treatment	2,700,000	March 1992–June 1994: £2 million; June 1994–January 1996; £0.5 million; £0.2 million retention not yet paid out2,867,620	
Total for physical works not specific to HCI	£9,400,000		£11,981,158

[1] December 1991: £2 million; April 1992; £2 million; December 1992: £4 million; April 1993; £4 million, October 1993; £3 million; February 1994; £1.3 million; February 1994; £1.3 million; September 1994: £1 million (this final payment was subsequently recovered).

Employees' Rights

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is available to employees of his Department for *(a)* maternity leave, *(b)* maternity pay, *(c)* paternity leave, *(d)* parental leave, *(e)* flexible working hours, *(f)* part-time work, *(g)* job sharing, *(h)* leave to care for sick children, *(i)* home-working *(j)* term-time contracts, *(k)* annual hours contracts, *(l)* workplace nurseries, *(m)* child care allowances, *(n)* carers' leave and *(o)* career break schemes; and what criteria are used to judge eligibility in each case. [27574]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1996]:* The executive agencies under the control of my Department have available, for employees, all of the provisions listed with the exception of *(d)* parental leave and *(m)* childcare allowances. The criteria used to judge eligibility are as provided in the Scottish Office staff handbook, a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library, and in Scottish Office management staff notices.

Employees in the Scottish Court Service have available all the provisions listed with the exception of *(l)* workplace nurseries and *(o)* career break schemes. The Scottish Prison Service has available all the provisions listed with the exception of *(d)* parental leave, *(j)* term-time contracts, *(k)* annual hours contracts, *(l)* workplace nurseries and *(m)* childcare allowances.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is available to employees of executive agencies under the control of his Department for *(a)* maternity leave, *(b)* maternity pay, *(c)* paternity leave, *(d)* parental leave, *(e)* flexible working hours, *(f)* part-time work, *(g)* job sharing, *(h)* leave to care for sick children, *(i)* home-working, *(j)* term-time contracts,

(k) annual hours' contracts, *(l)* workplace nurseries, *(m)* child care allowances, *(n)* carers' leave and *(o)* career break schemes; and what criteria are used to judge eligibility in each case. [27575]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 May 1996]:* My Department has available, for employees, all of the provisions listed with the exception of *(d)* parental leave and *(m)* child care allowances. The criteria used to judge eligibility are as provided in the Scottish Office staff handbook, a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library, and in Scottish Office management staff notices.

Improvement and Repair Grants

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent in each of the last five financial years by islands and former district councils in Scotland on *(a)* improvement and *(b)* repair grants. [28594]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is set out in the table.

Amount spent on improvement and repair grants, 1990–91 to 1994–95

Amount Spent (£000)

Year	*(a) Improvement grant*[1]	*(b) Repair grant*
1990–91	56,261	42,604
1991–92	69,181	44,216
1992–93	72,431	38,349
1993–94	67,127	33,793
1994–95	50,985	27,934
Total	315,986	186,896

[1] Includes amounts for standard and conversion grants.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes in the eligibility criteria resulted from the 1995 Fishing Vessels (Safety Improvements) (Grant) Scheme 1995; and if he will make a statement. [29176]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* Engines and other machinery for propelling the vessel and any items of a structural nature, including stability work, are now specifically excluded from grant under the Fishing Vessels (Safety Improvements) (Grants) Schemes 1995.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Galbraith: to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will establish a statutory code of conduct for the transfer of Scottish Homes' housing stock to private landlords; and if he will make a statement. [29969]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Scottish Homes has published its procedures relating to the transfer of its stock to alternative landlords. The arrangements it has put in place include a code of conduct for staff to follow when they are involved in proposals to acquire stock.

Wee Bankie

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the Wee Bankie in the Firth of Forth being designated an undisturbed area in accordance with the Esbjerg declaration. [29885]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* The Esbjerg declaration invited the European Commission and Norway to consider a proposal for experimental undisturbed areas for research purposes. We will be contributing to this work in advance of the intermediate ministerial meeting on the integration of fisheries and environmental issues, to be held in Norway in March 1997.

School Meals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken to improve school meals, following the publication of the report on the Scottish diet by a working party under the chairmanship of Professor Philip James in December 1993. [29302]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The provision of school meals, including the standard and quality of the food provided, is a matter for each education authority to determine. Following the publication of Professor James' report, the Government established the Scottish diet action group in November 1994 to make recommendations on action to improve the diet of the Scottish population, including that of children. This group is led by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, and its membership includes Professor James and representatives of educational interests. The group has now completed its work and expects to publish its action plan this summer. The Government will consider how best to advise education authorities in the light of that plan.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29424]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Scottish Office policy on the use of performance bonds is in line with the guidance set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48 "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses. This guidance makes clear that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractors. These will vary for each contract independently of the size of the contractor. In practice the Scottish Office has used performance bonds only on rare occasions in some major road contracts where the risks were considered to merit it. Statistics are not held centrally on the cost of bonds or the size of contractors involved.

Meat Companies (Compensation)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce additional compensation measures for meat companies which derived the majority of their sales revenue from beef exports prior to the imposition of the worldwide ban on British beef. [30011]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Government have announced a number of changes to the beef stocks transfer scheme following consultation which will be of assistance to licensed abattoirs and cutting plants which previously exported beef. The scope of the scheme has been extended to stocks owned by these bodies which were in transit to or stored in export markets on 9 April, in certain circumstances, destroyed overseas by, or at the instruction of, foreign Governments as a result of the crisis. The higher chilled value will be allowed for boneless primals frozen in the seven days before 25 March, where it is clear that this action was taken in response to frustrated export orders.

Special export refund beef will all be purchased at the chilled valuation. For eligible exports stocks currently overseas or in transit, destruction overseas may be allowed where this is the most cost effective method of disposal.

ENVIRONMENT

Endangered Species

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking with his colleagues in the Council of Ministers to preserve endangered species in the European Union. [29144]

Mr. Clappison: The primary instruments of the European Union to protect endangered species and their habitats, are directives 79/409 EEC and 92/43/EEC. Member states are obliged to transpose the provisions of these directives into national law and to take practical measures to meet their obligations for the conservation of listed species and their habitats.

Uranium Swarf Dumping

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to complete its inquiries into the dumping of drums of uranium swarf at Poplar farm, Chelveston; and if he will make a statement. [29581]

Mr. Clappison: HMIP has been incorporated in the new Environment Agency. I am informed by the agency that it has reviewed the evidence gathered during the investigation by HMIP, but that it has not yet taken a decision on whether to bring a prosecution under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. I have asked the agency for a further report on progress by the end of June, following which I will write to the hon. Member.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of applications for secure accommodation by homeless households were rejected for each of the last five years for which information is available. [29817]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested is not available. Data are collected from English local authorities on applications/inquiries made but they reflect differing local administrative practices, and because they are not reported on a common basis they cannot be used to produce national or regional estimates of applications, nor of the proportion rejected.

Recycling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures his Department has taken to monitor the level of research into recycling. [29851]

Mr. Clappison: Research into the many diverse forms of recycling is of interest to a wide range of policy areas in Government. Steps taken to monitor this research vary according to the needs of each policy area. The Enviroment Agency is under a duty to monitor research in the areas for which it is responsible, namely the regulation of solid waste, water and air quality.

As far as materials recycling is concerned, both my Department and the Environment Agency fund relevant research, including work on related economic and statistics issues. My Department also funds the Waste Management Information Bureau which collates information on waste research worldwide.

Passive Smoking

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new steps he is taking to ensure that all public houses have sufficient areas which are free from the dangers of passive smoking. [29822]

Mr. Clappison: The Government are considering how best to target advice and publicity about its code of practice on smoking in public places in those areas, such as public houses, which lag behind in establishing effective smoking policies.

The implementation of smoking policies in public houses is a matter for the discretion of managers, in line with the Government's voluntary policy which encourages the implementation of suitable smoking policies in all enclosed public places. Guidance on implementing smoking policies is given in the Government's code of practice on smoking in public places published in 1991. The code makes it clear that the Government expect every effort to be made to cater for the interests of the non-smoker.

Environmental Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of the United Kingdom's environmental policy aims and commitments made at the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 which have not yet been implemented, indicating in each case when he expects their implementation. [30135]

Mr. Clappison: Following the earth summit, the Government set out an eight point plan, which we subsequently agreed with our EU and G7 partners, for taking forward commitments entered into at Rio. The plan covered the ratification of the climate change and biodiversity conventions; the publication of national strategies on sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity and forests; contributing to the restructuring and replenishment of the global environment facility and a continuing commitment to financial assistance to developing countries.

The Government also announced the establishment of the Darwin initiative to provide grants to developing countries for biodiversity projects; the technology partnership initiative; and the holding of an international conference bringing together NGO experience from around the world.

All these commitments have been met. The Government also publish a White Paper annually which provides detailed information about progress in meeting commitments to sustainable development and which sets out priorities ahead. The latest in the series, Cm 3188, was published in March this year.

Air Pollution (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department takes to monitor air pollution in the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement. [29978]

Mr. Clappison: There are currently 13 automatic real time air quality monitoring sites in Greater London within the Department of the Environment's national network, listed in the table. In addition, there are more than 100 non-automatic monitoring sites within Greater London as follows: 90 nitrogen dioxide sites, 16 sulphur dioxide and smoke sites, three lead and multi-element sites and one site measuring toxic organic micropollutants.

As part of the expansion of the national automatic network, the Department aims to establish another two sites and integrate 11 locally operated monitoring sites within London, resulting in a total of 26 real time national monitoring sites in Greater London by the end of 1996.

Site name	*Pollutants measured*	*Grid ref*
Bexeley	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3, PM_{10}	TQ 518763
Bloomsbury	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3, PM_{10}	TQ302820
Brent	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3	TQ200840
Bridge Place, Victoria	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3	TQ291790
Cromwell Rd	NOx, SO_2, CO	TQ264789
Eltham	NOx, SO_2, O_3, PM_{10} Hydrocarbons	TQ440747
Earls Court	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3, PM_{10}	TQ251788
North Kensington	NOx, SO_2, CO, O_3, PM_{10}	TQ401821
Sutton, Roadside	NOx, SO_2, CO, PM_{10}	TQ256646
Sutton	NOx, O_3	TQ278548
Tower Hamlets	NOx, CO	TQ521816
University College	Hydrocarbons	TQ299822
Wandsworth	SO_2, CO, O_3	TQ234746

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis his Department has undertaken of the impact that market liberalisation has had upon industrial and commercial sector investments in energy efficiency. [30151]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Trends in energy efficiency are kept under review by the Department, but it is too early to say what the impact of market liberalisation has been on industrial and commercial sector investments in energy efficiency.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of her Department's agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30116]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since April 1992 the Department's remaining agencies market tested the following services:

Agency	*Outcome*
Building Research Establishment	
Engineering workshop	Test replaced by efficiency review resulting in savings.
Staff catering	Won by private sector
Audio visual services	In-house win
Office and printing services	In-house win
The Planning Inspectorate	
Secretarial support	In-house win

Two agencies, the Security Facilities Executive and the Buying Agency, previously the responsibility of this Department, have now moved to the Office of Public Service. In addition, the Department has itself tested the services provided by its agencies as follows:

management of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, which was won in-house;

21 separate research projects, which would previously have been undertaken by the Building Research establishment, with the result that 15 have been won by the private sector.

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many out-of-town shopping developments he gave approval for in England and Wales, during 1995. [29985]

Sir Paul Beresford: Statistics on appeal decisions in England, for which the Secretary of State is responsible, are not classified by location. Consequently, the information could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Homelessness (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent surveys have been undertaken by his Department as to the extent of homelessness among young, single people, in the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement. [29993]

Mr. Clappison: In November 1990, my Department commissioned a survey to collect comprehensive and up to date information about single homeless people in England. The results, based on interviews and field work in 10 local authority areas in England, including five London boroughs were published by HMSO in 1993 in the report, "Single Homeless People", ISBN 0 11 752800 5. This provided information on the characteristics of single homeless people, the reasons why they were homeless and their accommodation needs and preferences.

Monitoring arrangements for the Government's rough sleepers initiative include counts of people sleeping rough, undertaken twice a year by voluntary sector agencies. The latest count, in November 1995, found 270 people sleeping rough in central London—down from estimates of over 1,000 in 1990 before the initiative began. Of the 270 people found, only three were recorded as being under 18 years of age.

In October 1995, my Department issued a consultation paper, "Rough Sleepers Initiative, Future Plans", which invited all local authorities in England to assess the extent of rough sleeping in their areas. On the basis of responses to this consultation exercise, we have proposed further evaluation of the extent of rough sleeping in the London boroughs of Barnet, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Richmond upon Thames, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest and 16 areas outside London. I expect the information from this further evaluation to be available in September.

Factory and Agriculture Inspectors

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* factory and *(b)* agricultural inspectors were in post during the period 1987 to 1995. [30303]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following table shows the number of *(a)* factory and *(b)* agricultural inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive from 1987 to 1995. All figures are full-time equivalent staff in post.

1 April	*Factory*	*Agricultural*
1987	621.5	166
1988	592.5	158
1989	604	165
1990	634.5	171
1991	651	177
1992	698.5	183
1993	707.5	182.5
1994	702.5	187
1995	664.55	169

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities which will cover all or part of each of the parliamentary constituencies which will come into existence at the end of the present Parliament. [30354]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is contained in the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 1995, S.I. 1995/1626.

Council Tax (City of Nottingham)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the total sum, *(b)* the amount paid to the City of Nottingham, *(c)* the percentage of the total paid to the City of Nottingham and *(d)* the amount paid per dwelling in the City of Nottingham, in transitional relief in respect of council tax in each year from 1993–94 to 1995–96. [29270]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is as follows:

(a) *Total amount of transitional relief*

1993–94: £378,652,826

1994–95: £111,283,108

1995–96: £27,178,179[1]

(b) *Amount of transitional relief paid to Nottingham city council*

1993–94: £692,040

1994–95: £173,218

1995–96: £40,605[1]

(c) *Percentage of total amount of transitional relief paid to Nottingham city council*

1993–94: 1.8 per cent.

1994–95: 1.5 per cent.

1995–96: 0.15 per cent.[1]

(d) *Amount paid per chargeable dwelling in Nottingham*

1993–94: £6.18

1994–95: £1.54

1995–96: £0.4[1].

These figures are averages. The actual amount of transitional relief varied according to a household's council tax banding, its composition and its previous liability for community charge.

[1] Information for 1995–96 is provisional and is subject to final grant claims to be made during 1996–97.

Wildlife Habitat

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that wildlife which is dependent on the mudflats and grazing marsh of the Thames upstream of Gravesend and Tilbury is fully protected; and if he will make a statement. [29864]

Mr. Clappison: The most important areas for wildlife, West Thurrock lagoon and marshes and the inner Thames marshes, are notified as sites of special scientific interest. All areas of inter-tidal mud are acknowledged as being important for wildlife in the Thurrock borough local plan, deposit draft, and in the respective London boroughs' unitary development plans to varying degrees and are so annotated. A partnership of the main managers of the Thames has worked together to produce a Thames estuary management plan which will be launched for public consultation shortly. This inter-disciplinary plan is in line with recommendations in the UK biodiversity action plan to which the Government responded on 15 May, Cm. 3260.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30060]

Sir Paul Beresford: The deregulation initiative in the Department of the Environment is co-ordinated by two career civil servants, at grade 7 and higher executive officer level. Since it does not account for the whole of their workload, and all policy divisions devote resources to implementation of the initiative, it is not possible to define an overall annual budget. The deregulation unit in the Health and Safety Executive comprises one part-time

and four full-time career civil servants, at grade 7, senior executive officer, higher executive officer, executive officer and administrative assistant level, who work solely on deregulation matters. It does not have a separate budget.

Regeneration Spending

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum spent by Government Departments on regeneration in the last year for which figures are available. [30125]

Sir Paul Beresford: Economic, social and physical regeneration is supported through main programme expenditure by a number of Government Departments—including on housing, training and education, business support and other programmes. This main programme expenditure is supplemented by targeted programmes which have been brought together into the single regeneration budget. The provisional out-turn figure for SRB expenditure in 1995–96 is £1,358 million. Details about SRB expenditure is contained in the Department's 1996 annual report presented to Parliament on 20 March.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for changes to the existing system for registering the bird species listed in schedule 4 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement. [30585]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has been reviewing the scheme of fees for registration of certain bird species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wildlife and Countryside (Registration and Ringing of Certain Captive Birds) Regulations 1982, Statutory Instrument No. 1221.

In the light of this review uncertainty has arisen concerning the power to charge for registration of certain bird species under regulation 3. We have concluded that certain changes are required.

Accordingly, I propose to introduce a Bill, at the earliest possible opportunity, to clarify the powers to charge such fees. The Bill will, if Parliament agrees:

- provide a clear statutory basis for the charges levied in the past under the 1982 regulations;
- enable the Department to seek to recover fees in respect of registrations made between today's date and the date when the Bill's provisions come into force; and enable the Department to continue to levy charges in the future in respect of these registrations.

As from today, therefore, I shall not be requiring the payment of any fee in respect of registrations under the 1982 regulations, pending the commencement of the proposed new statutory provisions. However, if and when this legislation comes into effect, my Department will be seeking to recover fees in respect of registrations made from today until the new statutory provisions come into force.

This announcement and the proposal to legislate does not affect the requirement in section 7 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for keepers of specimens of bird species listed in schedule 4 to that Act to ring such birds and register them with the Department. It relates solely to the power to charge for such registrations.

The proposed legislation will also cover fees previously collected by the Department under Statutory Instrument No. 1219/1982, the Wildlife and Countryside (registration to sell etc. certain dead birds) Regulations 1982. The scheme was discontinued on 1 January 1995

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to the existing framework for compulsory competitive tendering from local authority housing management and professional services. [30643]

Sir Paul Beresford: Yes. Compulsory competitive tendering is improving the standards of local government services and delivering greater efficiency. However, the implementation of CCT for professional services and housing management has given rise to significant criticism from private sector bidders and professionals about the approach which many authorities have taken. They consider that many authorities are frustrating competition by any means at their disposal. Equally, local authorities have said that the competition is too weak to justify the start-up costs of competition. Against this background, the Secretary of State has reviewed progress on implementation to date and the preparations which local authorities are making for future CCT. This has confirmed the need for changes.

A consultation paper has been published today which sets out the details on the changes which the Secretary of State is minded to make. The proposals involve selective increases in the competition requirements, most notably a new 65 per cent. competition requirement on finance services, tightening-up the rules on the credits and allowances which local authorities can offset against the competition requirement, and changes to the values below which authorities do not need to go out to competition, most notably on housing management services. These changes will complement the new guidance on competition which was issued earlier this year and the robust line being taken with cases of anti-competitive behaviour by particular authorities.

A copy of the consultation paper, which invites comments by Tuesday 2 July, has been placed in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to encourage private finance initiatives in local government. [30644]

Mr. Curry: Since launching the local government private finance initiative in October 1994, we have encouraged links with the private sector by making important changes to the capital finance rules. These have been welcomed by authorities, but we promised to go even further.

I am today announcing radical measures to help local authorities harness private-sector finance and management expertise. In many cases these will remove genuine private finance projects from local authority

capital spending limits and provide revenue support for such projects. My aim is to encourage the provision of privately-financed and serviced facilities such as schools, leisure centres, transport schemes and police stations. I hope local authorities will take maximum advantage of these new opportunities.

Provided that schemes meet certain risk transfer tests in the regulations, and subject to the usual requirement for value-for-money appraisal, local authorities will in future be able to provide their services using facilities delivered under private-sector contracts, without any cost whatsoever to their capital resources.

The new regulations will define the circumstances in which such contracts need make no charge on authorities' capital resources. In summary eligible contracts will be those where:

the contractor is providing a service to a defined standard,

responsibility for designing, building, financing, and operating any physical assets rests with the contractor,

the authority's payments are directly related to performance or usage, or both, and vary according to the availability and quality of the service. If the service falls significantly below expectations the level of payments should be no more than 70 per cent. of that anticipated. This will mean the acceptance of real risk by the private sector.

We envisage that these regulations will cover the bulk of worthwhile PFI cases, and will give a clear target for authorities and prospective contractors to aim at. However, where the project is not strictly eligible under the regulations but nevertheless involves significant risk for the private-sector partner, we will allow authorities a second chance to protect their capital resources. Government Departments will be able to issue additional supplementary credit approvals on a case by case basis for PFI schemes meeting more flexible criteria than those in the regulations.

We recognise that these measures, while eliminating the capital impact of qualifying projects, could leave pressures on the revenue account. To combat this, we will ensure that authorities undertaking projects will be eligible for revenue support. This will be arranged by adapting the existing system of standard spending assessments and revenue support grant.

My Department will be consulting local authority associations and other interested bodies on these proposal. It is hoped to publish draft capital finance regulations for consultation within a few weeks, and to lay them before the House in time for them to come into effect in the autumn.

Construction Industry (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people in the west midlands were employed in the construction industry in each year since 1990; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [30155]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The information is as follows:

Construction employment in west midlands

	Employees		*Employees and self-employed*	
	Number	*Percentage change*	*Number*	*Percentage change*
Spring 1990	101,100	—	174,100	—
Spring 1991	97,000	–4	158,000	–9
Spring 1992	88,300	–9	153,300	–3
Spring 1993	78,800	–11	139,800	–9
Spring 1994	72,100	–8	141,100	+1
Spring 1995	76,000	+5	145,000	+3

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* private and *(b)* social houses, have been built in the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [30157]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The figures requested are as follows:

Housebuilding completions: West Midlands region

	Private enterprise		*Housing association*		*Local authority*		*Total*	
	Numbers of dwellings	*Change from previous year (per cent.)*	*Numbers of dwellings*	*Change from previous year (per cent.)*	*Numbers of dwellings*	*Change from previous year (per cent.)*	*Numbers of dwellings*	*Change from previous years (per cent.)*
1990	13,200	+3.9	2,100	+70.9	1,100	+4.3	16,400	+9.5
1991	13,600	+3.1	1,531	+27.7	1,100	–13.2	16,100	–2.0
1992	12,200	–9.9	2,300	+53.2	400	–60.9	15,000	–6.6
1993	13,200	+7.5	2,900	+23.8	200	–49.3	16,300	+8.3
1994	12,700	–3.4	3,100	+5.4	200	–4.1	16,000	–1.9
1995	12,500	–1.9	2,700	–13.2	100	–43.0	15,200	–4.6

Figures individually rounded, so the total may not be the exact sum of the component series. Percentage changes calculated on the unrounded figures.

These figures are based on reports to the Department by local authorities and the National House Building Council, and include estimates for those local authorities that have not provided statistical returns for their districts.

While these figures cover newly built accommodation, housing associations also provide additional social lettings by the rehabilitation of existing properties and through the various home ownership incentive schemes. Local authorities also provide a significant number of additional new lettings through cash incentive schemes. The relative importance of incentive schemes has been growing with the greater emphasis being placed on making more effective use of existing stock.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many construction industry companies in the west midlands closed in each year since 1990; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [30156]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Information in the form requested is not available. The following is the available information:

VAT Deregistrations in the construction industry: West Midlands

	Number deregistered	*Percentage change on previous year*
1992	3,396	n/a
1993	3,051	–10
1994	2,275	–25

VAT deregistrations are not synonymous with business closures and estimates for 1993 and 1994 include adjustments for the effect of the VAT threshold increase in November 1993.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many social houses were built in the west midlands in 1979. [30158]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Figures reported to the Department by local authorities show that there were some 2,000 housing association dwellings and 8,900 local authority and new town new dwellings completed in the West Midlands region during 1979.

Oil Spills, River Mersey

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the detergents used in the clean up operations following oil spills in the River Mersey from 1980 up to the latest spill; and if he will list each detergent's constituent chemical elements. [29716]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* I understand that neither North West Water Authority nor the National Rivers Authority used detergents as a dispersant in incidents of this kind. It is possible that other bodies may have made limited use of detergents. If this is the case, I shall write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agriculture Policy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial contribution to the European Union common agricultural policy was paid by each of the member states in 1995. [29722]

Mr. Baldry: Member states contribute to the European Community budget as a whole, and not to parts of it. A breakdown of member states' gross contributions to the European Community budget in the 1995 Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 1, *Official Report* L276 of 20 November 1995, page 39, a copy of which has been placed in the House Library.

Animal Feed

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the animal feed products currently on sale to UK farmers which *(a)* include and *(b)* do not include a clear list of contents on the packaging. [29579]

Mrs. Browning: All compound feeds are required by the Feeding Stuffs Regulations to carry lists of ingredients either by their specific name or by category.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent reports he has received about prohibited parts of cattle finding their way into the food chain; in how many cases such material had been certified fit for human consumption by the Meat Hygiene Service; what inquiry has been undertaken as to how these errors occurred; how many officials have been disciplined; what was the average length of time to identify such material; and if he will make a statement. [28459]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on 30 April, *Official Report*, columns *483-84*.

Civil Servants

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the companies which have civil servants from his Departments as directors, and for each company, the occasions on which it has been found guilty of improper trading or misrepresentation of company financial status in the last five years. [29252]

Mr. Boswell: The following companies currently have civil servants from my Department as non executive directors under the "Guide to Non-Executive Directorships for Civil Servants":

H. R. Wallingford
The Albert Fisher Group PLC
Cadbury Ltd.

As to "improper trading or misrepresentation of company financial status", there are no such offences in law.

Goosanders

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications he has received in each of the last five years for licences to kill goosanders; how many of these were granted; and how many birds were killed. [29840]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is as follows:

	Number of applications received	*Number of licences granted*	*Actual number shot*
January–December 1991	0	0	0
January–December 1992	0	0	0
January 1993–April 1994	11	7	39
May 1994–April 1995	28	0	0
May 1995–March 1996[1]	25	5	[2]2

Statistics on licences are now collated for the period 1 May to 30 April., Prior to 1994, figures were collated on a calendar year basis.

[1] Latest information available.

[2] Provisional figures.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the assessment of damage to fisheries underlying each licence to kill goosanders issued in 1996; what other methods were evaluated to tackle the problem; and if he will make a statement. [29842]

Mrs. Browning: Where licences were granted to shoot a limited number of goosanders as an aid to scaring, the Ministry was satisfied that serious damage was being caused to the fisheries. A wide range of alternative non-lethal scaring methods had been tried, for example, gas and rope bangers, rockets, horns, shooting blanks, human presence, but were found to be ineffective.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what has been the total cost to public funds of all registered fishing vessels decommissioned over each of the last five years; [30366]

(2) what plans he has to promote further decommissioning of the United Kingdom's registered fishing vessels. [30367]

Mr. Baldry: There were no UK decommissioning schemes in 1991 and 1992. The 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 schemes have cost £7.8 million, £8.8 million and £9.6 million respectively.

In the light of experience with these schemes, a consultation paper was issued seeking views on possible improvements to the arrangements. These are reflected in the details of the 1996–97 scheme announced on 9 May, for which some £13 million is available. There is currently provision of up to £12 million for a further scheme in 1997–98.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of United Kingdom registered vessels fishing for demersal species in the North sea over the past five years together with the total size of the demersal catch, the total value of the demersal catch and the number of demersal vessels decommissioned during each of the last five years for which figures are available. [30365]

Mr. Baldry: Figures showing the landed quantity and value of demersal fish, including nephrops, caught in the North sea, ICES area IV, for the years 1991–1994 inclusive are given in table 1.

These include species for which there is no mandatory reporting requirement in respect of fishing activity. Moreover, fishing activity is generally recorded in terms of total effort deployed by stocks and area. Extracting the information requested about numbers of vessels would involve disproportionate cost and fail to give a complete picture of activity in relation to all demersal species in the North sea.

Table 2 gives details of the number of vessels decommissioned in each round of the current programme by broad demersal segment.

Table 1: Landings of demersal species, including nephrops, by the UK fleet of catches in the North Sea: quantity and value

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total demersal (including nephrops)				
Tonnes liveweight	202,603	215,132	142,339	249,715
Thousand.	215,948	209,873	225,705	237,756

Table 2: UK fishing vessels decommissioned in the last 5 years: number by demersal segment

	Decommissioning scheme for:		
Vessels over 10 metres overall length	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Segment			
Beam trawl	4	8	6
Demersal trawl/seiners	84	109	54
Nephrop trawl	17	8	0
Lines and nets	9	24	33

Fishing (Irish Box)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels from other EU member states have fished in the Irish box since 1 January; which EU flags they were flying; what is the estimate of the tonnage caught by these vessels; and what were the principal ports where they landed their catches. [30368]

Mr. Baldry: The Irish box comprises waters which fall within both British and Irish fishery limits. Information about the total number of fishing vessels from other member states which have fished in the Irish box since 1 January 1996, the tonnage of fish caught by these vessels and the principal ports at which that catch was landed is not available on a systematic basis.

New regulations to monitor fishing effort in western waters including the Irish box came into operation on 1 January this year. They apply to vessels over 18m in overall length, 15m between perpendiculars, with effort ceilings being set for the over 18m fleet of each member state by the principal types of fishery other than those for pelagic fish. Vessels over 18m from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom are permitted to fish in the Irish box within the effort ceilings which have been set. The number of Spanish vessels permitted to fish in the Irish box is limited to a maximum of 40 at any one time.

Fishing (Spanish and Dutch Ships)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the amount of fish caught by *(a)* Spanish *(b)* Dutch flagged ships which is eventually marketed in the United Kingdom. [30370]

Mr. Baldry: Information on the amount of fish which is caught by such ships and which is eventually marketed in the United Kingdom is not available. In 1994 we estimate that Spanish and Dutch flagged ships landed about 2,150 and 2,200 tonnes of fish into the UK respectively. Some of this fish may subsequently have been exported.

UK-registered Fishing Vessels

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate how many vessels previously registered in other EU member states are now registered as United Kingdom fishing vessels; and what estimate he has made of the annual tonnage of fish caught by vessels so registered for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [30369]

Mr. Baldry: Information on the number of current UK fishing vessels previously registered in other member states and the tonnage of fish which they have caught over the last three years is not available.

Under the UK merchant shipping regulations it is possible for vessels previously registered in other member states or third countries to be registered as fishing vessels in the UK. But such vessels would not be permitted to fish for profit without acquiring a licence from UK Fisheries Departments. Under our present restrictive licensing arrangements no new licences are granted and an owner wishing to fish with a vessel new to the UK fleet would need to obtain a licence from a previously licensed vessel.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the benefits assessed by his Department as accruing to the United Kingdom fishing fleet from the common fisheries policy. [30363]

Mr. Baldry: The benefits to the United Kingdom fishing industry flowing from the common fisheries policy include:

- tighter restrictions than applied before we joined the Community on access by foreign vessels within our 12 mile fishery limits;
- restrictions on access to areas such as the Shetland box and the Irish box;
- a larger share of fish quotas in Community waters than was justified by our historic catch record in the 1973 to 1978 reference period used when quota shares were decided;
- fishing opportunities in the waters of non-member states secured through the Community's bilateral agreements with those countries;
- access to European Community grant schemes;
- a co-ordinated policy to reduce the size of fleets of all member states;
- a common policy on conservation rules enabling us to influence the rules applied in the waters of other member states to the benefit of our industry;
- monitoring of enforcement standards in all member states by the European Commission.

Fishing (200-mile Limit)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps would be required to regain control of the fishing effort within 200 miles of the United Kingdom coast. [30364]

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has never exercised exclusive control over fishing effort within 200 miles of its coast. We would have to leave the common fisheries policy in order to do so; I explained to the House on 22 November 1995 at column 591 the steps necessary for that to happen.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the enlargement of the EU on the viability of fish stocks in the North sea; [30372]

(2) if he will make a statement on the measures under consideration to conserve pressure fish stocks in EU waters during the current negotiations leading to enlargement of the EU. [30371]

Mr. Baldry: Negotiations for the further enlargement of the European Union are not scheduled to start until after the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference. Any impact on fish stocks will depend on a number of factors including the terms and timing of accession by the countries concerned, developments in the industry and developments in fisheries policy within the European Union where measures currently under consideration to conserve stocks include further reduction in fishing effort, new technical conservation rules and improved enforcement measures.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *209*, on what date each animal was confirmed to have been suffering from BSE. [29410]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* The following table gives the dates of birth of the 10 youngest cattle, including estimated ages, and the date at which BSE was confirmed:

Date of birth	*Date of BSE confirmation*
Autumn 1986	31 January 1989
January 1987	24 July 1989
November 1987	28 November 1989
Autumn 1987	11 May 1989
Autumn 1987	22 November 1989
Autumn 1987	26 March 1990
May 1988	26 July 1990
November 1988	26 March 1991
June 1989	20 January 1992
October 1990	20 May 1993

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many, and what percentage, of the maternal transmission test group study by the veterinary laboratory at Weybridge have been diagnosed as suffering from BSE. [29345]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* Forty-seven or 7 per cent. of the 630 study animals have so far developed BSE.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what preliminary assessment he has made as to the most likely cause of BSE in those animals in the maternal transmission test group study by the veterinary laboratory at Weybridge that have been diagnosed as suffering from BSE. [29346]

Mr. Browning *[holding answer 15 May 1996]:* The detailed cohort study into the possibility of maternal transmission of BSE will not be complete until early 1997. Some information about this experiment has been published in the progress report on BSE laid in the Library of the House in November 1995, but the result cannot be interpreted until it is complete. As the study is being carried out blind we do not know whether the 47 animals which have succumbed to BSE in the trial are offspring of BSE cases or whether they are control animals. The details of these animals are given in the table.

In all cases the farms of origin for the animals in this study have had cases of BSE, notably in the experimental animals dams, which indicates that some exposure to contaminated feed did occur on the farms. To take account of this a control animal was purchased from the same farm as the offspring of a confirmed case.

Until the experiment is completed and the results unblinded and analysed, it will not be possible to say whether maternal transmission of BSE can account for any of the cases, or whether all should be attributed to contaminated feed.

Distribution of confirmed cases in the offspring study by month of birth and period at 1 May 1996

	Period									
Month and year of birth	*July–December 1991*	*January–June 1992*	*July–December 1992*	*January–June 1993*	*July–December 1993*	*January–June 1994*	*July–December 1994*	*January–June 1995*	*July–December 1995*	*Total*
1987										
September	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
October	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	2
November	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
December	—	1	3	—	1	—	—	—	—	5
1988										
January	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
February	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	2
March	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
April	—	—	—	—	—		—	—	—	0
May	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
June	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
July	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
August	—	—	—	—	3	3	1	3	1	11
September	—	—	1	2	1	1	1	—	—	6
October	—	1	—	1	1	2	—	—	1	6
November	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2
December	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	—	4
1989										
January	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
February	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
March	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
April	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Grand total	2	2	8	4	6	10	5	7	3	47

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the means of disposal for the remains of cattle aged 30 months or over following processing of carcasses at rendering plants as part of the scheme to eradicate bovine spongiform encephalopathy from British herds. [29654]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced in the House on 16 April, *Official Report*, col. 513 that, following the process of rendering, the resultant material would be disposed of by the best practicable environmental option. The Government are actively pursuing the ways and means of achieving this objective and a further statement will be made when conclusions have been reached.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle were slaughtered in the United Kingdom under the 30–month scheme in the week beginning Monday 29 April. [28919]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* One hundred cattle were slaughtered in the United Kingdom under the scheme in the week beginning 29 April.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with under *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29415]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Ministry's policy is to review the need for performance bonds in the light of the value and complexity of the contract to be let. The Ministry has occasionally used performance bonds which would allow it to call in financial guarantees should a contractor fail to meet specified standards. These would be used to compensate the Ministry should a contractor fail to complete a contract because of, say, liquidation or default. The Ministry regards "on demand" performance bonds as unjust and undesirable. The Ministry believes that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the chosen contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor.

From records held centrally no performance bonds have been called in during the last five years.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29462]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Data extracted from its financial management system reveals that the Ministry, including its six next steps agencies, paid the sum of £262.98 million to the private sector for goods and services in the financial year 1995–96.

Food Labelling Regulations

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the consolidated food labelling regulations; when they will come into force; and if they will be accompanied by guidance notes published on the same day. [29921]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Government expect to lay regulations before Parliament by 7 June. These will come into force on 1 July and the accompanying guidelines will be published on the same day.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

20. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to appoint the independent complaints adjudicator for the Child Support Agency. [28824]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: An independent complaints examiner will be recruited for the Child Support Agency later this year following a pilot study to assess how best to support the examiner's operations.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the alleged child maintenance arrears and background calculations for CSA Ref. 1003420826; and for what reasons he has received documentation requiring payments in the year 2001, when his youngest child will be 24 years of age. [29867]

Mr. Mitchell: The Child Support Agency is charged with collecting legally due maintenance. Any arrears agreement negotiated is based on the amount of debt and the absent parent's ability to pay. The payment of arrears may, therefore, continue after the child has reached the age where regular maintenance is no longer due. The chief executive of the Child Support Agency, Miss Ann Chant, will write to the hon. Member separately detailing the circumstances of the case referred to.

Child Support

24. **Ms Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number of parents in one-parent families are entitled to child support; and of these, what proportion are receiving it. [28828]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is not known how many parents in one-parent families could obtain child support from the other parent if they applied for it. However, 341,500 parents with care, including 29,100 in two-parent families, had a full maintenance assessment from the Child Support Agency in November 1995. This includes 96,000 cases where the absent parent is assessed to pay nothing. In 60 per cent. of the remaining cases, maintenance is being paid in full or in part.

Benefit Fraud

14. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to tackle housing benefit fraud. [28818]

Mr. Heald: On 5 March my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a series of measures including an £8 million challenge fund to develop local authority innovation against fraud and a data-matching service to detect fraudulent benefit claims. These will not only step up the fight against housing benefit fraud, but also move towards preventing fraud from getting into the system in the first place.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in his Department have been employed full time in tackling social security fraud for each year since 1979. [30419]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the list:

1991–92: 3,344

1992–93: 3,344

1993–94: 3,328

1994–95: 3,363

1995–96: 3,793.5

1996–97: 5,046.

Notes

1. The numbers relate to staff employed in the benefit fraud investigation service (formerly sector fraud), organised fraud teams and staff employed on instrument of payment anti-fraud initiatives.

2. Prior to the creation of the Benefits Agency in April 1991, staff employed on fraud investigation duties were part of the local and regional office complement and information relating to numbers employed are not available.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the savings accruing to public funds from campaigns against benefit fraud in each since 1979. [30416]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	*Savings £ million*
1986–87	144
1987–88	196
1988–89	262
1989–90	309
1990–91	341
1991–92	446
1992–93	558
1993–94	654
1994–95	717

Notes:

1. Savings from the Department's anti-fraud measures have only been routinely collected from 1986–87.

2. Finalised figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the annual amount of money lost through fraud in child benefit payments; [30311]

(2) how many successful prosecutions there have been in the last year relating to child benefit fraud. [30312]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is not available.

The Benefits Agency is undertaking a series of benefit reviews which determine the amount of incorrectness, including fraud, in each benefit reviewed. Over the five-year period of the security strategy launched by the Secretary of State in July 1995, all the major benefits, including child benefit, will be reviewed.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much is being spent on the publicity campaign to tackle benefit fraud, set out by parliamentary constituency. [30421]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested as costings specific to parliamentary constituencies are not kept. However, to date the estimated total publicity costs for the first seven areas of the anti-fraud campaign are £407,710.

This figure covers radio and printed advertising, leaflet and poster production and distribution and press support material production.

Pensions

16. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of pension contributions in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries. [28820]

Mr. Heald: In 1994, employers and employees contributed almost £30 billion to occupational and personal pension schemes in the United Kingdom. It is this level of commitment that has generated pension funds of nearly £600 billion—substantially more than is invested in all the other countries in the European Union put together.

18. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning the level of funds currently held in the United Kingdom for private pension provision; and what assessment he has made of the level of funding relative to that in other European Union countries. [28822]

Mr. Heald: In 1993, the total value of funds in private pension schemes in the United Kingdom was nearly £600 billion. This is substantially more than the latest estimate of the level of funds in all the other countries in the European Union put together.

25. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the retired population will have occupational pensions by 2006. [28829]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the form requested. The Department's pensioner incomes simulation model projects that in 2010 more than 75 per cent. of pensioner units will be in receipt of payments from an occupational pension.

Details of the methodology and assumptions used in the model, and a brief overview of basic results, will appear in a technical paper to be released shortly.

Notes:

For the purposes of PENSIM, a pensioner unit is defined as a single pensioner over state pension age in 2010, or a couple with at least one partner over state pension age.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of pensioners over the age of 80 years, who receive the extra 25p per week on their state retirement pension. [29992]

Mr. Heald: At 30 September 1995, there were 2.4 million people over age 80 who received the 25p age addition to their state retirement pension.

Source:

5 per cent. sample of the pension strategy computer system.

Notes:

1. All people in receipt of the state retirement pension aged 80 or over, including people who qualify for a non-contributory retirement pension, receive the 25p addition.
2. The figure is rounded to the nearest 0.1 million.

Child Benefit

15. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of parents with children aged 16 to 19 years who receive child benefit; and what representations he has received about the payment of child benefit to them. [28819]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The latest figures available indicate that at 31 December 1995 there were 1.09 million families receiving child benefit in respect of children aged over 16 and under 19 in full-time non-advanced education. I have received only one letter questioning the payment of child benefit in respect of those over 16.

23. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people between 16 and 19 years in full-time education are currently in receipt of child benefit. [28827]

Mr. Mitchell: At the end of last year child benefit was payable in respect of 1.16 million people aged over 16 and under 19, in full-time non-advanced education. Entitlement to child benefit will continue until they leave that education or reach age 19, whichever is sooner.

27. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [28831]

Mr. Mitchell: The estimate of child benefit expenditure for 1995–96 in respect of 16 to 18-year-olds is around £640 million.

I believe that all families with dependent children should receive some help from either the tax or benefit system, a principle recognised throughout Europe and beyond.

The Government have a manifesto pledge to continue to pay child benefit to all families in respect of all children, including 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time non-advanced education, and to uprate it in line with prices. We have honoured that pledge.

Lone Parents

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average age of the income support claims withdrawn by parents with care following action by the Child Support Agency or liable relatives section in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1992. [29673]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not available.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents were on income support in each year since 1989. [29674]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information available is set out in the table.

Lone parents receiving income support

Year	*Number of claimants*
1989	756,000
1990	793,000
1991	871,000
1992	957,000
1993	1,013,000
1994	1,039,000
1995	1,056,000

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Lone parents are defined as claimants receiving the lone parent premium.
3. Sample size 1 in 20.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries 1989–1993
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries May 1994 and May 1995.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount paid to lone parents in income support *(a)* in money terms and *(b)* at constant prices in each year since 1989. [29675]

Mr. Evans: The information available is in the table.

Lone parents income support expenditure cash terms—1989–90 to 1995–96

£ million

Year	
1989–90	3,961
1990–91	4,680
1991–92	5,728
1992–93	7,107
1993–94	8,124
1994–95	8,884
1995–96	9,510

Lone parents income support expenditure real terms (1995–96 prices)—1989–90 to 1995–96

Year	*£ million*
1989–90	5,096
1990–91	5,574
1991–92	6,423
1992–93	7,657
1993–94	8,505
1994–95	9,128
1995–96	9,510

Source:

March 1996 departmental report and earlier equivalents.

Income Support

17. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and proportion of children under 10 years old are in families receiving income support. [28821]

Mr. Roger Evans: The number of children under 10 years old in families on income support in May 1995 was just over 2 million. This is approximately 27 per cent. of the total number of children under 10 years old in Great Britain.

Notes:

1. May 1995 is the latest available data in Income Support recipients.
2. Latest available estimates for the GB population relate to mid-94, the proportion is therefore based upon mid-94 population estimates.
3. *Source:* Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry—May 1995. Population Estimates Unit, ONS.

19. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families with children have been dependent on income support for five or more years; and what proportion this is of the total. [28823]

Mr. Evans: Information is not available in the form requested. However, in May 1995 there were 685,000 families with children—nearly 44 per cent. of the total—who had been on income support for three years or more.

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. May 1995 is the latest date for which data are available.
3. *Source:* Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry: May 1995.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

21. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about reduced earnings allowance; and if he will make a statement. [28825]

Mr. Roger Evans: Reduced earnings allowance continues to be paid as before to anyone who is under pensionable age or continuing in regular employment. A number of hon. Members have written to Ministers about the amendments to regulations from 24 March which brought in fairer rules for the transfer of people on reduced earnings allowance to retirement allowance when they reach pensionable age and give up regular employment.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the reduced earnings allowance. [28909]

Mr. Evans: Parliament agreed, in passing the 1988 Social Security Act, that compensation for loss of earnings through reduced earnings allowance should continue to past pension age only for those men and women who continued in regular employment. Otherwise it should cease and be replaced by retirement allowance, payable at no more than 25 per cent. of the rate of reduced earnings allowance.

Amendment regulations which came into force on 24 March ensure this principle is applied fairly and

consistently. These regulations were debated in Standing Committee on 8 May 1996.

Habitual Residence Test

22. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current cost of administering the habitual residence test; and what savings in benefits have been made in the current calendar year following the introduction of the test. [28826]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) on 23 April, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Pensioners Poverty

26. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social security what action he proposes to take to tackle poverty among pensioners. [28830]

Mr. Heald: Our policy has been to increase the basic retirement pension in line with the annual rise in prices, encourage personal provision through occupational and private pensions and to target additional resources on poorer pensioners through income-related benefits. Between 1979 and 1993 pensioners' average income increased by more than 50 per cent.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the percentage success rate for applications for incapacity benefit at each Benefits Agency office in Scotland for each month up to the most recent available; what was the number of appeals against refusal; and what percentage were successful in each case. [29280]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. George Foulkes, dated 20 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the percentage success rate for applications for Incapacity Benefit (IB) at each Benefit Agency (BA) office in Scotland for each month up to the most recent available; what was the number of appeals against refusal; and what percentage were successful in each case.

The attached tables give details of the percentage success rate for applications for IB at each BA office in Scotland. The information requested for the number of appeals against refusal on application and the percentage that are successful is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

The following table shows the percentage of successful (applications) claims to incapacity benefit for 1995–96. These decisions are made prior to the application of the IB all work test.

Local office	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Clyde Coast and Cowal											
Greenock	57.5	59.5	50.0	52.3	58.4	53.4	51.9	55.8	63.9	60.4	63.3
Port Glasgow	72.2	64.2	53.7	56.6	59.8	63.2	60.0	66.2	—	—	—
Clyde Valley											
Motherwell	66.9	60.1	65.6	64.9	64.5	63.7	62.8	64.7	66.2	63.4	65.3
Hamilton	75.6	62.3	64.9	60.3	68.6	69.6	62.9	60.4	68.9	64.8	69.1
Coatbridge											
Coatbridge	72.8	59.9	60.0	64.1	51.2	65.4	59.8	61.5	62.8	67.2	62.4
Airdrie	59.5	65.1	61.1	55.7	54.1	60.3	63.9	54.9	66.8	59.6	65.1
East Lowlands											
Edinburgh South	71.5	62.9	53.7	60.0	57.2	57.5	50.6	61.4	59.0	52.6	50.5
Edinburgh East	50.8	65.8	58.8	54.2	46.7	51.5	53.8	57.0	54.0	56.8	52.0
Galashiels	72.7	60.0	64.5	62.2	59.5	56.0	67.1	63.6	65.4	58.9	60.7
Fife											
Kirkcaldy	64.5	57.6	55.6	55.0	48.6	62.7	59.3	59.5	55.0	59.5	54.4
Cowdenbeath	66.1	62.7	57.6	62.1	55.1	57.3	64.3	62.8	72.2	59.6	52.3
Leven	65.4	62.3	66.4	54.6	54.0	66.7	59.4	70.7	62.7	60.2	55.8
Dunfermline	66.4	57.5	52.1	66.4	60.6	63.1	59.1	61.2	56.7	55.7	60.0
Forth Valley											
Stirling	72.6	56.2	63.1	62.8	55.8	59.8	64.4	58.5	55.1	63.0	57.1
Falkirk	64.8	63.4	58.4	55.9	63.1	57.9	66.1	58.4	68.9	62.2	59.0
Glasgow City											
Glasgow City	36.0	53.4	27.7	33.8	38.5	32.8	40.0	28.3	45.8	42.9	40.0
Glasgow Maryhill	57.9	55.1	59.2	54.5	49.1	54.4	55.6	55.1	59.6	59.4	52.7
Glasgow East											
Glasgow Shettleston	67.6	57.4	60.1	60.6	56.8	58.9	53.7	56.8	62.5	58.6	61.6
Glasgow Bridgeton	48.4	37.8	39.1	43.0	44.9	42.8	47.0	44.3	46.2	42.3	41.1
Glasgow Provan	47.9	42.9	43.1	44.6	32.2	43.2	47.3	52.4	50.6	43.1	46.1

Local office	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Glasgow Laurieston											
Glasgow Laurieston	52.8	58.9	54.5	47.2	55.8	53.8	51.9	55.0	58.9	55.1	46.7
East Kilbride	71.1	66.3	63.8	65.9	67.9	67.1	68.1	70.8	71.7	63.6	66.1
Glasgow South West											
Glasgow South West	55.7	53.1	56.5	54.5	51.8	51.9	56.6	51.4	61.9	52.8	55.7
Glasgow Springburn and Cumbernauld											
Glasgow Springburn	67.1	58.0	50.9	53.9	54.7	62.5	57.4	52.2	66.7	60.4	49.6
Glasgow Cumbernauld	70.9	71.0	64.5	71.1	69.0	68.3	69.9	67.1	72.7	69.4	68.5
Glasgow West											
Glasgow Anniesland	42.9	50.0	53.9	49.3	51.8	45.9	43.0	54.7	58.1	50.4	50.0
Glasgow Patrick	58.5	56.4	56.0	52.8	46.5	48.9	44.1	47.1	54.1	50.9	47.8
Grampian and Shetland											
Aberdeen	71.8	65.8	63.3	67.8	65.3	66.1	58.5	65.8	63.9	60.3	61.5
Lerwick	83.3	79.1	77.7	82.2	80.5	66.7	73.0	73.9	73.3	77.8	70.3
Peterhead	69.1	69.6	63.3	69.2	65.1	64.4	66.9	66.9	64.8	65.7	65.6
Highlands and Islands											
Inverness	67.5	57.1	54.7	53.4	59.7	55.1	59.1	59.6	61.3	59.6	66.0
Elgin	65.6	62.5	53.9	62.5	62.3	63.5	55.2	66.4	64.2	61.3	64.5
Fort William	60.0	58.8	47.6	61.7	61.7	56.5	63.0	59.6	57.1	51.3	52.8
Kirkwall	68.0	61.1	69.6	46.4	78.4	41.4	69.7	70.8	63.3	63.6	54.5
Stornoway	56.5	65.8	76.1	59.1	57.9	80.0	67.4	82.6	80.0	42.1	45.8
Wick	60.0	62.5	60.3	75.6	50.0	66.7	62.9	67.9	47.8	61.8	71.4
Irwine and Kilmarnock											
Irwine	61.6	54.2	58.5	55.8	59.2	61.5	57.9	61.9	64.0	59.4	60.3
Kilmarnock	66.7	57.7	60.2	65.2	60.9	50.0	60.0	63.3	52.7	51.0	61.9
Lomond and Argyll											
Clydebank	61.5	59.6	63.7	61.5	58.5	58.8	62.0	61.2	61.8	62.9	63.1
Cambeltown	47.3	58.3	46.9	58.9	51.5	60.7	64.3	50.0	75.0	52.9	58.8
Oban	47.4	69.7	65.6	73.8	80.0	58.1	51.1	56.0	73.7	62.5	59.3
Lothian and Central											
Edinburgh City	55.0	51.5	44.2	53.4	43.5	45.3	49.1	55.6	50.8	44.2	72.4
Leith	54.4	48.9	56.8	55.3	52.7	50.0	47.1	56.6	51.4	56.5	52.0
Lothian West											
Lothian West	69.2	64.9	62.3	62.1	59.3	59.6	58.1	62.2	60.8	62.2	58.1
Renfrew											
Renfrew	72.8	61.2	61.9	64.8	61.8	60.6	63.3	64.0	64.2	61.9	65.0
South West Scotland											
Ayr	66.7	56.7	58.6	54.7	57.4	56.4	58.0	55.3	68.6	63.4	55.3
Dumfries	72.4	72.5	63.4	67.7	61.4	65.4	64.4	72.3	64.7	67.2	62.1
Stranraer	67.6	51.1	66.7	60.3	71.4	58.7	70.5	51.2	68.5	63.3	55.0
Tayside											
Dundee	63.8	61.3	60.3	61.1	61.1	59.9	57.7	65.4	59.7	58.7	56.8
Arbroath	65.2	62.4	66.7	69.2	62.7	66.7	63.0	67.5	60.5	62.4	55.7
Perth	69.7	61.0	58.1	67.6	63.5	60.5	68.6	64.7	69.9	60.3	63.6

Notes:

1. Data for April 1995 is unavailable.
2. Clyde Coast and Cowal district: incapacity benefit claims moved from Port Glasgow to Greenock from January 1996.
3. Data is provsional and subject to amendment.

Source:

100 per cent. count of cases on the incapacity benefit system. Excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30061]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

DSS Deregulation Unit

Budget 1996–97	*Staff* *Civil servants* *Grade*	*Number*	*Staff Seconded from business*
	UG7	0.75[1]	
£88,000	HEO	2.00[1]	None
	AA	0.25	
	Total (wte)[2]	3.00	

[1] Have experience of the private sector.
[2] Whole-time equivalent.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received a report on the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's review of the prescription for industrial injuries disablement benefit purposes of chronic bronchitis and emphysema in underground coal workers; and if he will make a statement. [30645]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary for State has today laid a copy of the council's report before Parliament, Cm 3240. As with all Industrial Injuries Advisory Council reports, it will be given careful consideration. We will respond to the council's recommendations once the medical, administrative and financial issues raised by the report have been fully examined.

Claimant Statistics

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the number of people claiming means-tested in-work benefits, *(b)* the number of claimants' adult dependants and *(c)* the number of their children in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1995. [27830]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 2 May 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Figures for 1994 are given as this is the last year for which complete information is available.

Persons claiming means–tested in–work benefits[1]

	May 1979	*May 1994*	*October 1995*
Family income supplement/family credit[7]			
Number of persons claiming	78,000	551,000	643,000
Number of adult dependants[6]	40,000	315,000	355,000
Number of children	[9]184,000	1,123,000	1,297,000
Disability working allowance			
Number of persons claiming	[8]n/a	4,251	7,644
Number of adult dependants[6]	[8]n/a	1,633	2,881
Number of children	[8]n/a	3,048	5,764
Housing benefit			
Number of persons claiming	[3]n/a	316,000	[4]n/a
Number of adult dependants[6]	[3]n/a	139,000	[4]n/a
Number of children	[3]n/a	349,000	[4]n/a
Council tax benefit			
Number of persons claiming	[3]n/a	332,000	[4]n/a
Number of adult dependents[6]	[3]n/a	186,000	[4]n/a
Number of children	[3]n/a	382,000	[4]n/a

Notes:
[1] Means tested in-work benefits are defined as family income supplement/family credit, disability working allowance and housing benefit and council tax benefit paid direct to people with earnings who are not on income support. The same individual may be claiming more than one benefit.
[2] Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand except for disability working allowance where exact figures are quoted.
[3] Comparable data on housing benefit and council tax benefit is not available for 1979.
[4] Data for housing benefit and council tax benefit is not available for 1995.
[5] The figures include estimates due to the data collection procedure in Scotland.
[6] Adult dependants are defined as the partner of the claimant.
[7] Family credit replaced family income supplement in April 1988.
[8] Disability working allowance was introduced in April 1992.
[9] Approximate figure based on number of families with varying multiples of children.
Sources:
Social Security Statistics 1979.
Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.
Disability working allowance 100 per cent. count of claims.
Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample taken at the end of May 1994.

Departmental Property (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the tender board for the rationalisation of his Department's land and buildings in Newcastle upon Tyne to reach a recommendation on choice of tenders; when he expects to make a decision; and if he will communicate his decision to the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). [30427]

Mr. Heald: A recommendation as to the choice of the preferred supplier for the DSS Newcastle estate development project is due to be made early in June. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State will make a decision following careful consideration of the recommendation. A copy of the announcement will be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 May 1996

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Central Office of Information

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if staff from the Central Office of Information will be allowed to put in a bid for work earmarked for market testing which they currently carry out for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and if he will make a statement. [29981]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *235*. I have decided that COI's activities should become more closely focused and it would not be compatible with this aim for COI to compete in market tests carried out by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Andersen Consulting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on how many public sector computer projects Andersen Consulting has advised since 1985; how many of these and which have *(a)* been substantially delayed and *(b)* failed; and how many claims for compensation against Andersen are now in progress. [29996]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally and it would be disproportionately expensive to obtain it. From the information that I have, which may not be complete, I can say that since 1993 the following contracts have been awarded to Andersen Consulting:

Department of Social Services/War Pensions Agency—War Pensions Project, 1993;

MOD/Procurement Executive—ASPECT study and report, 1993;

MOD/Navy—WRAM project, 1993;

Department of Employment—Image Processing, 1993;

MOD/Navy—ACCESS project, 1995;

Department of Social Services/Contributions Agency—National Insurance Recording System 2, 1995;

Employment Service; Department of Social Services/Benefits Agency jobseeker's allowance review and implementation, 1995.

None of these projects has been substantially delayed and none has failed. So far as I am aware from the information available to me, there are no claims for compensation against Andersen in progress, but this information is not held centrally and it would cost a disproportionate amount to collect it.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each of his Department's agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide; and what were the results. [30047]

Mr. Willetts: The market testing of services provided by this Department's agencies is a matter for their chief executives and for their customers. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from N. E. Borrett to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply to your Question about the market testing of our services.

Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (PACE) was set up on 1 April this year following Ministers' decision to implement the findings of an Efficiency Scrutiny Report on the Management of the Government's Civil Estate. The roles of PACE set out in the Scrutiny recommendations which by their nature have to be performed in the public sector aim to ensure that the benefits of a centrally managed estate are retained following the transfer to departments of full responsibility for the properties they occupy.

The Agency has a key role to promote co-operation between departments to enable them to obtain best value for money in the management of their properties. This may either be in relation to departments' or agencies' activity in the property market or promoting opportunities for inter-departmental rationalisation.

PACE also provides a single central point for the provision of general property advice. The Central Advice Unit (CAU) was set up a year in advance of the Agency to assist departments taking on their new responsibilities.

Where departments decide that it will not be economic to retain skills in-house, PACE provides intelligent client support on repayment terms. By charging for this particular service PACE are, in effect, being market tested by departments because the work would otherwise be carried out by their own staff.

The Agency has been reconstituted out of Property Holdings (PH), which ceased to exist at the end of March. Since 1990, PH had managed the Government's Common User Estate (CUE), comprising mainly general purpose office property. PACE has therefore as a result inherited considerable experience in procuring and managing private sector services. Though maintenance responsibilities for some buildings on the CUE had been passed to departments, PH remained largely responsible for estates and most works services. In its last year (1995/96) PH had funding of £550 million for rents and £127 million for maintenance and new works. All estates and works services were undertaken by consultants and contractors in the private sector. During the early years of PH's existence services previously handled within Government by the Property Services Agency (PSA) had all been market tested. Consultants analysed Property Holdings savings from market testing. The level of fees paid under market tested commissions in 1992–93 were estimated to be some 40% less than the rates charged in the previous year under supply and service arrangements with the PSA.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 20 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Office of Information, to your question about the market testing of services.

COI has not market tested any of the services it provides for clients in the last year. Its activities are subject to constant market testing by customers who are under no obligation to use its services.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply to your question about market testing in his department's Agencies.

The Chessington Computer Centre has not carried out any market testing since April 1995. This is because Chessington has been working to prepare itself for privatisation in 1996.

The sale of Chessington is on target for late July.

There has however, been a steady programme of market tests carried out since April 95 by customers on the services we provide for them.

I hope this provides the information that you need. If it does not please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Letter from Robin Guenier to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 20 May 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), I am responding on behalf of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to your recent question raised about market testing of services provided by CCTA.

I am able to inform you that no services provided by CCTA have been market tested.

Letter from S. H. F. Hickey to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 20 May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question on the Market Testing that has been carried out into the services that the Civil Service College provides.

The College provides training and consultancy services to the Civil Service and also the wider public sector and internationally. We have no tied customers and thus are operating in a competitive market with other providers of these services. About three quarters of our income in 1995/96 came from open courses run mainly at Sunningdale Park and our London centre. The remainder of our work is single-client training and consultancy and is normally won following some form of competitive tendering which may well form part of our customers' market testing programmes.

The College carries out its own training and consultancy and we have not market tested any of this provision. We do however use a considerable amount of input from outside sources. Over 50% of teaching input is from non-Civil Service College Staff. This is a strategic decision to ensure quality, relevance and flexibility and ranges from associate lecturers doing individual sessions on a course to partnership with Price Waterhouse to jointly deliver courses on the Private Finance Initiative.

Ancillary services which include services which are provided by us to our customers, such as hotel and catering services, have been subject to market testing.

Letter from John King to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 21 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to write to you directly, with information about SAFE's market testing. This is in response to your recent PQ addressed to him.

SAFE is an Executive Agency with a remit to provide a range of security services to Government. It has no tied customers and as a result it is for our customers to choose to use the Agency and most do this through market testing or other forms of competitive bidding. The Agency undertakes a great variety work to a value of £40M to £45M per annum and I regret that it is impractical to list all the individual items.

Recently, the Agency did, however, initiate a major market test of one of its four operational units—the Inter Despatch Services (IDS). The IDS has a turnover of about £2½M per annum and the in-house team won against stiff competition from the private sector. The outcome has been significant price reductions for IDS customers.

Letter from Chris Penn to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 21 May 1996:

In the temporary absence of our Chief Executive, I have been asked to reply, so far as HMSO is concerned, to your Parliamentary question about the market-testing of the services provided by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's agencies.

The cost-effectiveness of the services that HMSO offers is frequently tested in the market-place by our customers. There have been some losses but a significant and growing proportion of our business has been won in open competition.

In terms of our own programme of market-testing, HMSO has tested a number of key service areas over the years, and our Annual Reports have regularly recorded the results. In the last year or so, we have announced the outcome of two market tests covering important elements of our Publications distribution business. A test of the order and enquiry services was awarded jointly to the in-house team and a commercial telesales company, EWA Ltd of Chelmsford. The new service began at the start of the year and is already demonstrating improvements in service standards. These include much reduced telephone call waiting times, increases in the numbers of order lines processed and a more proactive response to customers' needs. More recently, the test of receipt, storage and distribution arrangements was awarded to the in-house team with the prospect of both service and cost improvements.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Dr. E. C. McCloy to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 20 May 1996:

Mr. Willetts, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, has asked me to reply to your question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asking him to list, for each of his department's agencies, the results of market testing of the services they provide.

In the period since 1 April 1995 no market testing was carried out of the services provided by the Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OHSA). As part of the privatisation process of the Agency some government departments have indicated that they may wish to market test the provision of occupational health services but no formal announcements have been made.

In the past (1994–95) the OHSA market tested the provision of laboratory services which resulted in an aggregate net value of efficiency gains of £7,000 in each of the three future financial years.

Letter from Craig Muir to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 21 May 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning market testing into the services provided by Recruitment and Assessment Services (RAS).

As you are no doubt already aware, RAS was established as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1991. We provide recruitment, consultancy and related services to government departments, executive agencies and other public service bodies.

As a result of government departments and executive agencies being given responsibility to carry out their own recruitment above Executive Officer level in 1991 (with the exception of the most senior appointments and fast stream entrants), RAS was faced with the challenge of competing against private sector recruitment companies for public sector business

The great majority of RAS potential customers now subject recruitment agencies to market testing by competitive tendering on the range and quality of services they are able to provide before appointing the successful bidder. RAS is not immune from this process and our reaction from this increased competition was to continue to develop and expand the range of services and recruitment products we are able to offer, both to those who had decided to carry out their own recruitment (sometimes with our assistance) and to those who had selected RAS to run the recruitment campaign for them.

Despite a general decline in the number of appointments on offer, the wider range of services and products we are able to provide led to 1994–95 being our most successful year since our inception.

We had a marked increase in market penetration. Our share of Civil Service recruitment rose to 11% in 1994–95 (compared to 7% in 1993–94), and from a deficit of £333,000 in 1993–94 to a surplus of over £415,000 in 1994–95. There was also a significant increase in consultancy and other recruitment related services. In total, 1,173 consultancy days were provided in 1994–95, an increase of 146% over the previous year.

I hope that you will see from the above that the services of RAS are in the continuous process of marketing testing; it is only by remaining competitive and high on quality that we will maintain our position as the leading provider of recruitment and related services to a wider market as we head for privatisation later this year.

Letter from S. P. Sage to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 20 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply on behalf of the Buying Agency to your recent parliamentary question concerning the market testing of the services provided by the agencies for which his department is responsible.

You may find the following background useful. TBA is a government trading fund with a sales turnover this year projected at around £250m, an expenditure budget of £5m and 125 staff. The agency offers a full range of procurement services to its public sector customers.

TBA has no tied customers or business. It operates on a fully commercial basis and must continue to minimise costs in order for its services to remain competitively priced and attractive to customers. All TBA's services are market-tested regularly by customers, either as a result of winning business through competitive tenders or through customers' own price comparison exercises.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has reached a decision on the short-list of bidders for HMSO. [30789]

Mr. Freeman: HMSO was advertised for sale in March, and a large number of organisations expressed interest in the sale. We subsequently received 14 indicative bids, and I am pleased to announce that the following parties have been short-listed:

an independent consortium backed by Mercury Asset Management, 3i and Capita;

a Hambros consortium;

National Publishing Group, a consortium led by Electra Fleming;

Westminster Information System, led by NatWest Ventures.

Each of these will now prepare final bids based on detailed information about HMSO and discussions with its management and staff.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what progress has been made in drawing up a contract for the provision of printing and publishing services to the House after the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. [30990]

Mr. Beith: A draft contract has been prepared by the House's legal advisers, and has been approved by the Commission for release to the short-listed organisations bidding for HMSO. A copy of the draft—excluding certain financial provisions which are commercially confidential—will be placed in the Library on Tuesday 4 June when the House returns from the spring adjournment. The Commission considers that the draft contract provides the safeguards stipulated in the Speaker's letter of 28 November 1995 to the Lord President of the Council, *Official Report*, 11 December 1995, columns *455–57*.

The provisions of the draft contract are not subject to negotiation with the short-listed bidders.

TREASURY

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of his agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30045]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executives of the Royal Mint, the Office for National Statistics, the Valuation Office and Paymaster agencies. I have asked each of them to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Longford to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

In your question to the Chancellor (ref: 30045) you ask what market testing has been carried out into the services provided by the Agency and what were the results.

The Valuation Office is an Executive Agency within the Inland Revenue and carries out valuations of land and buildings for a wide range of clients in the public sector throughout England, Wales and Scotland, including an estate surveying and valuation service for other government departments, public bodies and local authorities.

The main functions of the Valuation Office are to:

undertake rating and council tax valuation work in England and Wales;

provide valuation services to the Inland Revenue in England, Wales and Scotland mainly in connection with inheritance tax and capital gains tax;

provide various other statutory and non-statutory valuation services to Government Departments and the wider public sector in England, Wales and Scotland;

assess, make and recover contributions in lieu of rates in respect of Crown occupation of properties within the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Gibraltar and make payments of rates in respect of properties in the United Kingdom occupied by overseas Governments;

Provide policy advice to Government Departments and Ministers on property valuation matters.

The initiative to undertake market testing for non-statutory work rests with other government departments, public bodies and local authorities and the Valuation Office responds by tendering on a regular basis for estate surveying and valuation services in competition with the private sector.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Letter from Roger Holmes to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question about market testing.

The Royal Mint has operated as a trading fund since 1 April 1975 and already runs on a commercial basis with normal private sector disciplines rigorously applied. As a leading player in export markets with two-thirds of our sales overseas, all our sourcing decisions must be commercial. In these circumstances the Royal Mint does not operate a formal market testing programme, but managers review regularly whether goods and services should be provided internally or outsourced and, as a result, sub-contract or outsource a wide range of items.

I trust my reply is helpful.

Letter from Keith Sullens to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question asking if he will list for each of his agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results.

The following tables show what services PAYMASTER has had market tested and what the results were:

Banking business

Service Market Tested	*Result*
56 NHS Trusts and Health Authorities	Either retained existing level of business or gained additional business in some cases
Teachers' Pensions Agency	Lost the banking transaction business but retained the vote funding element
NHS Pensions Agency	Retained
Countryside Council for Wales	Retained
Further Education Funding Council	Retained
Funding Agency for Schools	Won
English Nature	Part retained
BBSRC	Part retained

Pension services

Service Market Tested	*Result*
Teachers' Pensions Agency	
Database and Payroll Services	Retained
Customer Services	Lost to in house bidder
NHS Pensions Agency	
Pensioner Payroll and Administration	Retained via subcontract with MDIS
Pensioner Administration Computer System	Lost

Letter from Tim Hold to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question of 17 May about market testing of services provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The ONS was created as a new government department and executive agency on 1 April 1996. It brought together the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) and the Central Statistical Office (CSO). This response provides information covering market tests completed by March 1995. Competing for Quality figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for the ONS Efficiency Plan. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

CSO Market Testing Activities up to March 1995:

Activities included in the 1995 Next Steps Review

Catering Services

Retail Price Index (local price collection)

Statistical Methodology

Training

Other activities, not published in the 1995 Next Steps Review

Internal Audit

Graphic Design Services

Producer Price Index (computer development)

Four of these were awarded externally, three retained in-house.

OPCS Market Testing Activities up to March 1995:

Activities included in the 1995 Next Steps Review

Reprographics

London Housekeeping

Registration Bindery

Redevelopment of NHSCR IT system

Other activities not published in the 1995 Next Steps Review

Voice and Data Communications

One of these was awarded to the private sector, four were retained in-house.

Community Transit Procedures

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence the Government has submitted to the European Parliament committee of inquiry into community transit procedures. [30167]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At a preliminary stage of its work, the European Parliament committee of inquiry into community transit procedures invited Governments to respond to the areas of investigation outlined under its terms of reference. A response by HM Customs and Excise was sent to the committee on 19 March 1996. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Members' Library.

Income Level Research

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will arrange for the Inland Revenue to increase the sample size of information collected from its files to enable a more accurate assessment of income levels by local authority area. [30398]

Mr. Jack: The size of the sample for the survey of personal incomes is set with a view to meeting efficiently its primary purpose of providing information relevant to the costing of income tax proposals affecting the United Kingdom as a whole. As such, a plan to increase its size is not required.

Some information from the survey of personal incomes on income levels by local authority areas is already published in "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995". Like all information derived from sample surveys, the figures are subject to statistical variation and the published tables indicate which estimates are particularly uncertain.

Film, Recording and Publishing Industries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the levels of *(a)* the invisible and *(b)* the visible imports and exports of (i) the record industry and (ii) the publishing industry over the past three years. [30350]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates are not available in the format requested. For visible trade, the estimates to the nearest definition available are given in the following table:

£ million

	Publishing of recorded media[1]		*Of which: sound recordings*	
CDID	*Exports WIQC*	*Imports WLJD*	*Exports QAED*	*Imports QDYH*
1992	1,292	877	231	148
1993	1,543	902	237	166
1994	1,762	956	301	192
1995	1,999	1,058	375	231

Note:

[1] Includes books, newspapers, journals and periodicals, sound recordings and other publishing.

Source:

Business Monitor MQ10 "Overseas Trade analysed in terms of industries".

For invisibles, the estimates are available only for the overall classification group "publishing printing, performers and other recreation services".

The latest available figures are given in the following table.

£ million

	Royalties and services from "publishing, printing, performers and other recreation services" industry	
	Exports	*Imports*
1992	537	259
1993	665	331
1994	790	429

Source:

First Release (CSO (95) 280) "Overseas Earnings from Royalties and Services".

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current level of employment in *(a)* the film industry, *(b)* the record industry and *(c)* the publishing industry. [30349]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested is available only at census of employment dates. Figures from the latest census at September 1993 are shown in the following table.

Employees in employment in Great Britain: September 1993

Industry	*SIC92 code*	*Level*
Motion picture and video production[1]	92.11	11,200
Publishing of sound recordings[2]	22.14	1,700
Publishing of books, newspapers, journals, periodicals etc[3]	[4]22.1	117,200

[1] Includes production of motion pictures and video tape. Excludes related areas such as motion picture and video distribution and projection, reproduction of video from master copies, activities of own account actors etc.

[2] Includes publishing of gramophone records, compact discs and tapes with music or other sound recordings. Excludes related areas such as reproduction from master copies of gramophone records, compact discs and tapes.

[3] Includes publishing of postcards, timetables, forms and posters. Excludes related areas such as printing.

[4] Less 22.14

Information about employment in related areas is available from "Census of Employment Statistics 1993" which is available in the Library.

Employment Levels

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the changes in employment levels for *(a)* employees and *(b)* the self-employed for (i) full-time males, (ii) part-time males, (iii) full-time females and (iv) part-time females between spring 1995 and 1996. [30162]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information is not available for spring 1996 until 14 August 1996 when provisional results will be published in the labour force survey first release. The latest information from the LFS showing the change in employment levels between winter 1994–95 and winter 1995–96 are shown in the table.

Employment changes in Great Britain between winter 1994–95 and winter 1995–96[1] Seasonally adjusted.

	000
Employees	
Full-time males	+138
Part time males	+76
Full-time females	+19
Part-time females	+201
Self-employed	
Full-time males	–62
Part-time males	+4
Full-time females	0
Part-time females	–11

Note:

Provisional.

Source:

Labour Force Survey.

EU (UK Contribution)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the United Kingdom gross contribution to the EU in 1996; and if he will express this total as a sum per person per week. [30216]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's gross contribution to the European Community budget for 1996–97 is £7,733 million, after account is taken of the UK's abatement. Assuming a population for the UK of 58.3 million, the estimate translates arithmetically to £2.54 per person per week.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net contribution to the EU in 1996; and if he will list the principal areas in which revenue is returned from the EU. [30217]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Community budget for 1996–97 is £2,899 million. Included within the estimate is a total of £4,834 million for public sector receipts. The great bulk of these receipts come from the three major Community funds, as follows:

Fund	*1996–97 £ million*
European Agricultural and Guarantee Fund	2,999
European Social Fund	1,068
European Regional Development Fund	744

Value Added Tax

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest available figures for *(a)* under-declarations and *(b)* over-declarations of VAT voluntarily disclosed; and what assessment he has made of the preventive effects of assurance visits on these figures. [30053]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Customs' latest audited figures for VAT voluntarily disclosed in the year ended 31 March 1995 are as follows:

(a) under-declarations—£366 million

(b) over-declarations—£568 million.

It is not possible to quantify the preventive effect of assurance visits on these figures.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research has been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by Customs and Excise into the link between VAT compliance and assurance visits; if the results are published; and what plans he has for additional research in this area. [30054]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Customs tells me that it has an on-going programme of research into the link between VAT compliance and assurance visits. It asks academics to carry out research to evaluate the effect of the assurance programme on trade sectors. None of the material produced so far is of sufficient general interest to warrant publication, although it has been made available to interested parties inside the Department.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of VAT arrears have been written off in each of the last 10 years. [30055]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Write-off figures for 1995 have not yet been finalised. The value of VAT remitted or written off in the previous 10 years was as follows:

1994: £550,464,000

1993: £742,376,000

1992: £745,773,000

1991: £515,335,000

1990: £212,715,000

1989: £176,478,000

1988: £225,780,000

1987: £216,354,000

1986: £178,601,000

1985–86: £238,999,000.

From 1 April 1986, schedules of these amounts have been prepared on a calendar year basis. Figures for 1986 cover the period 1 April to 31 December.

Insolvency accounts for approximately 90 per cent. of all VAT write-offs or remissions.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29364]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* No Ministers or officials from my Department have attended meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people who have been mis-sold personal pensions since 1986. [28813]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* There is no reliable estimate available of the number of people who have been mis-sold personal pensions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Jammu and Kashmir

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received in respect of the general election in India concerning the percentage of electors in Jammu and Kashmir who cast votes; and if he will make a statement. [30441]

Mr. Hanley: Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are being spread over three days: 7, 23 and 30 May. Turnout in the constituencies of Jammu and Ladakh, where polling took place on 7 May, but where the count has not yet begun, is estimated to have been around 55 per cent. and 80 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of those United Kingdom nationals who observed on behalf of the United Kingdom recent elections in Jammu and Kashmir; if he will place their reports in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [30443]

Mr. Hanley: A member of our high commission staff in New Delhi visited the constituency of Jammu during the elections on 7 Mary. The overall atmosphere was peaceful. The high commission's report on that visit is an internal document and will not be placed in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received to date, concerning those taken hostage in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [30440]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are aware of recent reports that the hostages may be dead and, together with the Indian and other Governments, are working to assess whether or not they are true. We continue at present to work on the basis that the hostages are alive and to work hard for their early and safe release.

We keep in close touch with the families and give appropriate briefing to the constituency Members of Parliament involved.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when a decision is to be taken by the post in Islamabad on an application by Mrs. Tazeem Akhtar and her children (ref. IMM/C7358) to enter the United Kingdom; when the results of DNA tests in relation to this application were received; and if he will make a statement; [30235]

(2) when a decision is to be made on the application made to the post in Islamabad by Mrs. Muzamal Jan and her two children (ref. IMM/C7226) to enter the United Kingdom; when the applicant was interviewed at the post; and if he will make a statement. [30234]

Mr. Hanley: I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply form the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as possible.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [30258]

Mr. Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans at present to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Angola

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what UN sanctions are currently being enforced against UNITA. [30331]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: UN Security Council resolution 864 of 15 September 1993 imposed a ban on the sale or supply to UNITA of arms and related materials and military assistance, as well as petroleum and petroleum products.

UN Peacekeeping

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on peacekeeping operations of the United Nations' borrowing of funds from its peacekeeping budgets. [30500]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Funds borrowed from peacekeeping budgets to meet cash shortfalls on the UN regular budget have had no appreciable impact on UN peacekeeping operations.

Conventional Forces in Europe Review Conference

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's position with respect to the CFE review conference; and what the British delegation will seek to achieve at the conference. [30501]

Mr. David Davis: The CFE review conference is the forum for an operational review of the treaty and for resolving outstanding treaty implementation issues. To this end the UK delegation's aim will be to:

- conduct a review of the treaty's operation;
- support efforts to resolve the flank problem and other outstanding implementation issues;
- consider any proposals for discussions on the future of the treaty.

WPC Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State, Home Office, of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 213, what representations have been made to the Government of Libya about two people in the Libyan bureau in London in 1984, possessing diplomatic immunity, suspected of the murder of WPC Fletcher. [29297]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* We asked the Libyan Government to co-operate with the police investigation into the murder of WPC Fletcher at the time. They refused. In the absence of such co-operation it was not possible to bring charges against any individual. There were therefore no grounds for making further representations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30120]

Sir John Wheeler: This is a matter for the chief executives of each agency. They will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Jan Walters to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your question about market testing the Agency's services.

The Agency already outsources the delivery of programmes and services which account for 80% of the Agency's annual budget. Since 1992 the Agency has undertaken a vigorous competing for Quality programme and has continued to scrutinise its programmes and services. Scoping studies have been carried out in the following areas:-

1992/93: Training Centre Network

1993/94: Business Support: Jobclubs

1994/95: Disablement Advisory Service

1995/96: Careers Service (Including Jobskills pre-entry)

These studies have not led to further contracting out of services or programmes but have resulted in substantial savings being identified and realised.

Most notable so far, the examination in 1992/93 of the potential for market testing the Agency's network of Training Centres prompted a major reorganisation of the network, involving running costs of £10.6m and 626 staff (approximately 40% of Agency staff). This re-organisation resulted in total annual running cost savings which rise to approximately £2m by the end of 1995/96, as well as total annual programme cost savings rising to approximately £2m over the same period. The Business Support study resulted in cash savings of £134k per annum.

The Agency's revised Framework document includes a commitment to continue to examine the scope for and, if appropriate, implement proposals for market testing with a view to ensuring best value for money.

Furthermore, a comprehensive study due for completion shortly is examining the current and future potential roles of the private sector in delivering the Agency's services.

Letter from F. G. McConnell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU)

to reply to your question about market testing within Executive Agencies.

An independent study of the scope for market testing of IRTU's activities has recently been completed. The study involved a detailed examination of the Agency's activities and recommended that none of these is appropriate for market testing. This recommendation is being considered.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Letter from D. J. Bell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Question about what market testing has been carried out into the services provided by the Valuation & Lands Agency for Northern Ireland.

Since its launch as a Next Steps Agency on 1 April 1993, only once has market testing been fully carried out on a service provided by the Agency.

In that instance, market testing was carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and as a result, the valuation service previously provided by the Agency to the NIHE throughout Northern Ireland, was restricted to that part of Northern Ireland covered by the NIHE's Western Region.

I trust this information is sufficient for your purposes but if you think I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Letter from F. Jardine to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question on market testing on behalf of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

NISRA was established as a Next Steps Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel on 1 April 1998. Its role is to provide statistics, social research and civil registration services and to undertake the Census of Population. The Agency thus shares a number of functions in common with the Office for National Statistics (ONS). In the short period since it was established NISRA has not market tested any of its services but is committed in the Framework Document to examining the scope for future market testing.

The collection and processing of much regional statistical data in Northern Ireland is closely linked to analogous GB activities and the market testing of such work is normally undertaken in association with the ONS. Prior to Agentisation Northern Ireland with GB to market test the collection of prices information which contribute to the Retail Prices Index (RPI). The collection of RPI data was transferred subsequently to the private sector.

Letter from D. Court to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 May 1996:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State to list for each of his Department's Agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results.

As Chief Executive of the Government Purchasing Agency, I am replying on his behalf.

The Government Purchasing Agency was launched on 1 April 1996 and is responsible for the provision of a professional procurement service for Northern Ireland Departments, their agencies and the Northern Ireland Office. It also manages the procurement process and advises Ministers on all issues relating to procurement policy.

Each year Departments will review their Service Level Agreements with the Agency and are free to obtain their services from elsewhere, if they so wish. Therefore the Agency, while unable to market test itself, is subject to a continuous market test by its customers.

The Agency does contract out some of its work and it is intended to continue to examine opportunities for this in the future.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on market testing.

The Social Security Agency has not market tested any of its services since its establishment in July 1991.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Letter from P. Devlin to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about market testing carried out into the services provided by his Department's agencies and the results.

I should like to explain that there has been no market testing of child support maintenance services.

I hope you find this information useful.

Letter from Ronnie Brown to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on market testing in agencies.

On 1 November 1992 Health Estates commenced the market testing of design, consultancy and site supervision services in respect of clients' healthcare buildings.

In each of the three reporting periods since then the in-house team has demonstrated its ability to offer competitive bids for these services and to win sufficient work to ensure the full utilization of the current staff resources.

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding market testing.

As part of the Agency's Prior Options review in 1994 an entry was placed in Market Testing Bulletin inviting those with an interest in the Agency's work to respond. In addition, the Northern Ireland Office, the Agency's parent department, wrote to a number of organisations who were viewed as having an interest, these included the Law Society of Northern Ireland, the Chartered Institute of Loss Adjusters, the Association of British Insurers, the Northern Ireland Bankers Association, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and the Northern Ireland Bar Library. Letters were also written to the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Select Committee and to the 17 Northern Ireland MPs.

There were responses only from the Law Society, the Chartered Institute of Loss Adjusters and one MP. In each case the view was that administration of the compensation schemes in Northern Ireland should be carried out by a public body, such as the Agency, accountable to Parliament and Ministers and that it would be inappropriate for the private sector to handle such sensitive material.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about market testing undertaken by Government agencies.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service became an executive agency on 1 April 1995. None of its functions have been subject to direct market testing in the intervening period. However, a prior options review of its payroll services, which was completed in 1995/96, resulted in a number of recommendations for a more efficient organisation of the service, including a reduction in the number of posts required. In addition, prior options reviews of the works department, pharmacy services and fire prevention arrangements were started in 1995/96 and will be completed during the current year.

Letter from R. A. Hall to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 May 1996:

You recently raised a Question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland asking if he would list for each of his Department's Agencies, what market testing had been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results.

I have been asked to reply to you directly. My Agency was launched on 1 September 1995 after a prior options study had been conducted on the provision fo the service. That study concluded that the service should be established as an Executive Agency of the Northern Ireland Office. No market testing of the service was carried out.

Letter from D. W. Gallagher to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about market testing of our services.

No market testing has yet been carried out though there are plans to market test our services in toto after 1 April 1997.

Letter from J. F. Codd to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your question about market testing by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland. In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying on his behalf.

We had two core activities in the market testing programme for 1993–94:

(i) resurvey at basic scales for preparation of master survey documents; and

(ii) data conversion of large scales topographical archive to digital information.

A judgement was made that their small size meant that the cost of preparing for formal market testing would have exceeded potential savings. Consequently we kept the work in-house on condition that we achieved at least 10 per cent. cost reduction in 1993–94 and succeeding years.

Letter from J. B. Watson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

I refer to the question which you recently put to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, asking for Information on market testing in each of his Department's Agencies. This matter has been referred to Chief Executives for reply and this response covers the Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency.

The Agency was set up with effect from 1 April 1992, following a complete review of the activities. This review considered all options for the future provision of Driver and Vehicle Testing and concluded that a Next Steps Agency represented the optimum means of delivery. In 1993 privatisation of the private car vehicle testing operation was examined. This review also concluded that the existing arrangements were the most efficient. A full review of the Agency is planned to commence next year.

Letter from Brendan Hagee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your question in relation to Market Testing which has been carried out into services provided by the Department's Agencies and the results.

DVLNI invited tenders in relation to a market test on Local Vehicle Licensing Offices during 1994. The bid was won in-house and a new contract commenced 1 July 1995.

Letter from A. P. W. Malcomson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Question as to what market testing has been carried out for the services provided by this Executive Agency and what were the results.

The following Public Record Office areas have been subject to market testing (ie, Competing for Quality): cleaning, catering, wordprocessing, reprographics and information technology. The first two functions were contracted out centrally; the third was reduced in scale but retained in-house; and the fourth and fifth were retained in-house. Another area, namely Repository, was also retained in-house subject to the achievement of 10% efficiency saving.

Letter from C. E. Ronaldson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about Market Testing of the services provided by his Department's Agencies.

A Prior Options Study was carried out on Works Service (Construction Service's predecessor) prior to the launch of the Agency on 1 April 1996.

Since 1 April 1996 none of the services provided by Construction Service have been Market Tested.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Service, to your parliamentary question about what market testing has been carried out into services provided by his Department's agencies and the results.

Grounds maintenance at the 2 largest of the 7 Country Parks, managed by this Service, was market tested in 1991. In both instances the work was won by the in-house bid, which proved to be the cheapest.

Grass cutting operations at 42 of the 181 State Care Monument sites managed by us in the eastern half of Northern Ireland were market tested in 1994.

This area was chosen as it contained the greatest concentration of monuments in commercially viable groups. In all, 4 groups were market-tested and the work was won by the in-house bid in each case.

Letter from Arthur H. Moir to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

A Prior Options Review of the activities of the Land Registry. Registry of Deeds and Statutory Charges Register which was completed in 1995 recommended Agency Status and was accepted by the Office of Public Service on the basis that the new Agency would consider the market testing of non-core functions.

None of the Agencies activities have yet been Market Tested. All of the Agencies activities are being fundamentally examined, as part of the current efficiency plan, in a Business Process Re engineering Project. This will be completed by the Autumn. The Agency is also attempting to secure a private sector partner under the Private Finance Initiative to computerise the Land Registration process. Market Testing will be considered further when these projects are completed.

Letter from H. R. F. Flester to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

You recently tabled a written question on the issue of market testing for answer by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As the Water Service has been a Next Steps Agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland since 1 April 1996 this has been forwarded to me, as Chief Executive, for reply in respect of the Agency.

The Water Service has been engaged in a market testing and efficiency review programme since the late 1980s and will, within 2 years, have market tested or carried out efficiency reviews of 50% of all its activities.

The activities covered in the most recent part of this programme, between October 1994 and March 1996, are:

1. Collection and transportation of water quality samples

2. Sludge tankering

   Septic tank emptying

   Minor to major sewage treatment works, and major sewage treatment works to disposal points.

3. Sewer maintenance

   Clearing of blockages and desilting.

   Sewer and manhole repairs and construction.

Of these recent market tests 64% were won by the in-house teams.

Letter from V. Crawford to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your question about market testing which has been carried out by Roads Service. In his absence I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive.

Prior to becoming an Executive Agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland on 1 April 1996, Roads Service market tested a number of road maintenance and inspection/testing functions. In addition, street lighting maintenance, car park management, the Strangford Ferry Service, Roadman Training Centre, Castlenavan Quarry and the materials testing maintenance contracts were lost to the private sector, but the remainder, representing approximately 90% of the work tested, was won by in-house teams.

The agency has not completed any market tests since it was created. It does, however, intend to test approximately three quarters of its work during the next 3 years.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 May 1996:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your question about what market testing has been carried out in the services provided by The Planning Service and what were the results.

The Planning Service since it became an Agency, within the Department of the Environment, on 1 April 1996, has not carried out any market testing. In 1993 The Planning Service market tested the "Area Plans Research and Analysis process" which is the first stage in the preparation of Area Development Plans. The work market tested was for 6 Area Plans extending over a period of 18 months and was awarded to the In-House team.

A second market test to revisit the market is scheduled for completion by 31 March 1997 and is included in the Agency's Business Plan.

Sinn Fein Candidates

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Upper Bann for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30514]

(2) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for North Down for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30515]

(3) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for South Down for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30516]

(4) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Newry and Armagh for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30517]

(5) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Strangford for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30518]

(6) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Fermanagh and South Tyrone for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offence with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30519]

(7) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for West Tyrone for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30520]

(8) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for South Antrim for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30529]

(9) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Foyle for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30531]

(10) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Mid-Ulster for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30521]

(11) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Belfast, North for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30522]

(12) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Belfast, South for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30523]

(13) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Belfast, East for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30524]

(14) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Belfast, West for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30525]

(15) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for Lagan Valley for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30526]

(16) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for East Londonderry for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30527]

(17) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for the East Antrim for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date or release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30528]

(18) if he will list the Sinn Fein candidates for North Antrim for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which they have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him; [30530]

(19) if he will publish the regional list of Sinn Fein candidates for the elections on 30 May and indicate any terrorist offences with which each candidate has been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted and the sentences given and served, the date of the offences and the date of release or as much of such information as is readily available to him. [30532]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to indicate terrorist offences with which any of the candidates nominated by Sinn Fein to stand for election on 30 May, and listed in full in the *Belfast Gazette*, may have been charged or convicted, or details relating to sentences any may have served. To enable the Royal Ulster Constabulary's criminal records office to begin a search of its records it would be necessary to provide the office with the full name, date of birth and address of each person. As this, however, would not guarantee that the correct person had been identified, the RUC would further require a set of fingerprints to compare with those held on record.

European Fund for Peace and Reconciliation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the maximum sum of money per head of population in each district council in Northern Ireland which can be obtained from the European fund for peace and reconciliation. [30322]

Mr. Moss: Under sub-programme 6 of the EU special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland 1995 to 1999, a proposed sum of £35 million will be allocated among Northern Ireland's 26 district council areas to take account of both population and levels of relative deprivation. The maximum sum of money per head of population in each district council area in Northern Ireland under sub-programme 6 is as follows:

District council	*Allocation per capita (£)*
Antrim	12
Ards	13
Armagh	16
Ballymena	13
Ballymoney	14
Banbridge	13
Belfast	34
Carrickfergus	11
Castlereagh	11
Coleraine	13
Cookstown	28
Craigavon	14
Derry	36
Down	14
Dungannon	25
Fermanagh	20
Larne	15
Limavady	30
Lisburn	19
Magherafelt	20
Moyle	25
Newry and Mourne	24
Newtownabbey	13
North Down	11
Omagh	19
Strabane	43
Average	21

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff were employed by his Department on BSE-related research during *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993, *(d)* 1994 and *(e)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [26004]

Mr. Boswell: The following numbers of MAFF staff have been employed on BSE-related research:

Year	*Staff years*
1991–92	n/a
1992–93	116.8
1993–94	104.1

Year	Staff years
1994–95	103.8
1995–96	102.8

n/a = not available.

These figures do not reflect the totality of MAFF's BSE research programme as MAFF also funds BSE-related research at non-MAFF establishments. MAFF staff are also employed on work related to the diagnoses and monitoring of the disease.

Directorate of Fisheries Research

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for the future organisation of the directorate of fisheries research. [30671]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The directorate of fisheries research was recently the subject of a prior options review. This looked at the need for its services, and how they could be provided most effectively. Following this review, the Government have decided that the directorate of fisheries research should become a next steps executive agency of MAFF. This will give it greater management freedom to improve performance within a framework of targets set by Ministers while retaining it within the public sector. My intention is that this change should take place on 1 April 1997 if this can be achieved, and in any event as soon as practicable.

Horticulture Research International

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received about the proposed privatisation of Horticulture Research International; [30013]

(2) what steps he has taken to protect the interests of small to medium-sized horticultural enterprises following privatisation of Horticulture Research International; [30015]

(3) what guarantees of future funding for Horticulture Research International he will give following privatisation; [30016]

(4) if he will make a statement on the planned time scale for the privatisation of Horticulture Research International. [30020]

Mr. Boswell: No decisions have been taken on privatisation of Horticulture Research International.

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the meetings and consultations which he has had with representatives of the horticultural industry to discuss the future of Horticulture Research International in the last six months. [30014]

Mr. Boswell: Horticulture Research International is the subject of a prior options review which is looking at a variety of options, including whether it should remain in the public sector. The review team has met the following representatives of the horticultural industry:

The Apple and Pear Research Council
East Malling Trustees
Horticultural Development Council
National Farmers' Union

Written comments were received from the following additional horticulture associations:

East Malling Research Association
Horticultural Research Association
Horticultural Trades Association
Mushroom Growers Association
National Hop Association
Potato Marketing Board
Processors and Growers Research Organisation

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his plans for the future of Horticulture Research International; and if he will make a statement. [30018]

Mr. Boswell: As part of the prior options review, the future status of HRI is now to be considered by the Prime Minister's adviser on efficiency, Sir Peter Levene. Decisions on the outcome will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the benefits to small to medium-sized horticultural enterprises which will accrue from privatisation of Horticulture Research International. [30019]

Mr. Boswell: In reaching a decision on Horticulture Research International's future status, the Government will take into account the responses received from the horticulture industry in the course of the prior options review.

Departmental Staff (Directorships)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those MAFF employees who currently hold directorships with companies engaged in the sourcing, processing, distribution or retailing of food, the dates of their appointment and the income or secondment received by his Department for their service. [30392]

Mr. Boswell: Under the guide to non-executive directorships for civil servants, Mr. A. R. Burne and Mr. B. J. Harding currently hold directorships in companies engaged in the sourcing, processing, distribution or retailing of food. The dates of their appointments are October 1994 and March 1996 respectively. The Department does not receive any income or secondment from these appointments.

Lindane

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to publish the results of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides' review of the agricultural uses of the pesticide substance lindane. [30786]

Mrs. Browning: The committee completed this review at its meeting on 15 February. The Government have accepted the committee's recommendation that all present agricultural uses of lindane should continue without unacceptable risks to people or the environment.

Full details of the review are given in the committee's evaluation document which was published on 2 May. Copies of the document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Forman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made on the implementation of the new EU rules on the welfare of animals in transport; and if he will make a statement. [30962]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In October last year, we circulated our proposals for implementing the new EU rules on the welfare of animals in transport to over 600 interested organisations and individuals. That initial consultation ended in December and we have been considering the comments received. There are some issues on which it is now possible to give a clearer indication of the shape of future legislation. There are other issues where we shall need to consult interested parties further on how we should take practicalities into account while providing improved welfare conditions.

It is now clear that there is nothing to be gained by bringing forward early legislation on particular aspects of the directive. We shall, instead, develop practical and workable measures, which we shall implement in a single statutory instrument later in the year.

One of the central issues to emerge from consultation has been how livestock markets will fit in with the new rules. Consultation has clearly underlined the difficulties in requiring a "paper trail" to follow individual animals from farm of origin through markets and beyond and we will not now be pursuing this. We shall be consulting further on alternative approaches to markets to ensure that the continuity of protection required by the EU rules is provided.

We have also been considering the requirement for transporters to be competent. It had been our intention to require such transporters to undergo a formal assessment of their competence. However, we have decided, in the light of the consultation exercise, that this would impose an unnecessary burden on the majority of transporters and that, in common with approaches in other sectors, the onus should instead be on transporters to show that their staff have the necessary competence. In order to help both transporters and enforcers, it is our intention to provide a framework of the competences required.

We want to take the time available to us to make sure that all the detail of our implementing measures is sound and practical. We have therefore asked officials to continue discussions with all interested parties. When we have firmer proposals, we shall set these out in a further consultation document before finally deciding what approaches to adopt.

Collection Centres

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of collection centres approved in accordance with EU legislation on animal health. [28626]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 May 1996]:* As at 17 May 1996, the following livestock markets and assembly points were approved as collection centres, as defined in Council directive 64/432/EEC:

Penrith Auction Mart, Agricultural Hall, Skirsgill, Penrith, Cumbria;

Kirkby Stephen Auction Mart, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria;

Lazonby Auction Mart, Lazonby, Penrith, Cumbria;

Kendal Auction Mart, Appelby Road, Kendal, Cumbria;

Sedbergh Auction Mart, Station Road, Sedbergh, Cumbria;

Skipton Auction Mart, Gargave Road, Skipton, North Yorks.

Leyburn Auction Mart, Richmond Road, Leyburn, North Yorks;

Applegarth Market, Romanby Road, Northallerton, North Yorks;

York Livestock Centre, Murton, York;

Malton Cattle Market, Cattle Market, Malton;

Bentham Auction Mart, High Bentham, Lancaster;

Thirsk Auction Mart, Station Road, Thirsk;

The Auction Mart, North Road, Ripon, North Yorkshire;

Lingfield Farm, Colton, Tadcaster;

Lancaster Farmers Auction Mart, Golgotha, Lancaster;

Light Foot House Farm, Light Foot Lane, Fulwood, Preston;

Brockholes Arms Auction Mart, Garstang Road, Claughton on Brock, Garstang;

Haslingden Auction Mart, Private Lane, Bent Gate, Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancs;

Deben Farm, Land Dyke Lane, Scalford, Melton Mowbray, Leicstershire;

Northampton Cattle Market, Victoria Promenade, Northampton;

Stratford-upon-Avon Cattle Market, Alcester Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire;

Airfield Farm (Calf Centre), Airfield Farm, Bearley Road, Snitterfield, Warwicks;

The Cattle Market, Craven Road, Rugby, Warwickshire;

Melton Mowbray Cattle Market, Scalford Road, Melton Mowbray, Leics;

Henley In Arden Market, Warwick Road, Henley in Arden;

Market Harborough Cattle Market, Foxton Road, Lubenham, Market Harboroug;

The Grange Farm, Boon Hill, Bignall End, Stoke on Trent;

Lichfield Auction Centre, Woodend Land, Fradley;

Prospect Farm, Millmeece, Eccleshall, Staffs;

Walnut Croft, Poole, Nantwich;

Crewe Livestock Market, Barker Street, Crewe;

Beeston Smithfield, Tarporley, Cheshire;

Chester Auction Centre, Bumpers Lane, Chester;

Hilltop Farm, Newton by Frodsham, Warrington;

Elm Bank, Whitchurch Rd, Rowton, Chester;

Chelford Agricultural Centre, Chelford, Cheshire;

Bank Farm, Hough, Crewe;

Ross-on-Wye Livestock Centre, Overross, Ross on Wye, Herefordshire;

Hereford Cattle Market, Hereford Market, (Market Office), Hereford;

Shrewsbury Livestock Auction, The Smithfield, Harlescott Lane, Shrewsbury;

Market Drayton, Cattle Market, Addreley Rd, Market Drayton, Shropshire;

Oswestry Cattle Auctions, New Smithfield, Shrewsbury Rd, Oswestry, Shropshire;

Kidderminister Cattle Market, Comberton Hill, Kidderminster;

Salisbury Agricultural Centre, Salisbury Road, Netherthampton, Salisbury;

Gloucester Market Auctioneers, The Cattle Market, St Oswalds Road, Gloucester;

Forest Gate Farm, Pewsham, Chippenham, Wiltshire;

Chippenham Livestock Market, Cocklebury Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire;

Chowle Farm, Faringdon, Oxford;

Lodge Farm Calf Holding Shed, Lodge Farm, Barnard Gate, Witney Oxon;

Banbury Market, Banbury, Oxfordshire;

Homestead Farm, Petham, Canterbury, Kent;

Abbotsland Farm, Capel Le Ferne, Folkstone, Kent;

Kingsley Hill Farm, Warbleton, Rushlake Green, Heathfield, East Sussex;

Coxhill Farm, Shepherdswell, Dover, Kent;

Ashford Market, Ashford, Kent;

Maidstone Market, Detling, Maidstone, Kent;

'Wyjac' Ashill, Nr. Ilminster, Somerset;

Chancellors Farm Calf Unit, Chancellors Farm, Wanstron, Nr. Shepton Mallet;

Halsey Cross Farm, Over Stowey, Bridgwater, Somerset;

Mendip Farm, Hornblotton, Shepton Mallet, Somerset;

Frome Market, Standerwick, Frome;

Truro Market, 58 Lemon St, Truro, Cornwall;

Helston Market, St. Johns Rd, Helston, Cornwall;

Penzance Livestock Market, Poniou Road, Long Rock, Penzance, Cornwall;

Liskeard Market, Liskeard, Cornwall;

St. Austell Market, Pentenan Rd, St. Austell, Cornwall;

Wadebridge Market, Wadebridge, Cornwall;

Upperwood Farm, Threapwood, Malpas, Cheshire;

Gaerwen Livestock Market, Gaerwen, Ynys Mon;

St. Asaph Market, The Roe, St. Asaph, Clwyd;

Dolgellau Market, Dolgellau Smithfield, Dolgellau;

'Davela', Llyswen, Brecon, Powys;

Halifax Agricultral Services, 5 Walters Rd, Swansea;

Cowbridge Cattle Market, The Buthe, Cowbridge;

Newport Cattle Market, Newport, Gwent;

Penderyn Market, Boedwiged Farm, Penderyn;

Cardigan Market, Station Road, Cardigan, Wales;

Whitland Livestock Market, West St, Whitland;

Llanybydder Market, Carms, Wales;

Dingwall Auction Mart, 15 Tulloch St, Dingwall Ross-Shire;

Ben Nevis Auction Mart, Corpach, Fort Williams, Invernesshire;

Thurso Auction Market, Ormlie Road, Thurso, Caithness;

Lochmaddy Auction Mart, Lochmaddy, North Uist, Western Isles;

Caithness Livestock Centre, Quoybrae, Watten, Caithness;

Agricultural Marketing Centre, Staneyhill, Lerwick, Shetland;

Orkney Auction Mart, 44 Junction Rd, Kirkwall, Orkney;

Huntley Auction Market, The Ward, Huntley, Aberdeenshire;

Thainstone Agricultural Centre, Thainstone, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire;

Glenfield Market, Glenfield Road, Paisley;

Stathaven Auction Mart, Station Road, Strathaven;

Stirling Auction Mart, Kildean, Stirling;

Oliver and Son, New Mart Rd, Edinburgh.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30066]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The 1995–96 annual budget for the MAFF deregulation unit covering pay and non-pay costs was approximately £96,000. The unit consists of four permanent members of staff, one at each of the following grades: grade 7, higher executive officer, executive officer and administrative assistant. In addition, there is involvement at more senior grades including the grade 5 head of division to whom the deregulation unit reports. All members of staff are career civil servants, none of whom has been seconded from the business sector. The grade 5 has some experience of the private sector through a non-executive directorship.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe and Western European Union

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the information bulletin on the activities of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western European Union covering the period October 1995 to April 1996. [30790]

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what representations he has made to the Indian Government since the general election; and if he will make a statement; [30442]

(2) if he will invite the next Prime Minister of India to visit the United Kingdom to discuss the resolution of the Kashmir dispute; and if he will make a statement. [30439]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 23 April, *Official Report*, columns *191–92*. Our policy on Kashmir remains unchanged. I look forward to an early opportunity to discuss bilateral and other issues, including Kashmir, with the new Indian Prime Minister.

Ministers (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all those occasions on which Ministers from Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Offices have participated in overseas trade or goodwill missions on official business during *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* in the programme for 1996–97. [29941]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* Ministers promote British business and British jobs at every available opportunity. The information requested is as follows:

Minister	*Country*
Welsh Office	
1994	
Right hon. John Redwood	Japan
Mr. Gwilym Jones	Australia/New Zealand/ France/Belgium
Sir Wyn Roberts	Spain/Sweden/Italy
Rod Richards	Saudi Arabia

Minister	Country
1995	
Right hon. William Hague	Japan/Korea/Hong Kong/Spain
Rod Richards	Argentina/Dubai/United Arab Emirates
Gwilym Jones	Italy/Germany
1996	
Right hon. William Hague	USA
Rod Richards	Indonesia
Gwilym Jones	Luxembourg/Spain
Scottish Office	
1994	
Right hon. Ian Lang	USA/Belgium
Allan Stewart	Japan/Germany
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	Finland
Lord Fraser of Carmyllie	USA/Greece
Sir Hector Monro	Norway/Canada/France
1995	
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton	Norway
George Kynoch	Taipei/Finland/USA/Spain
The Earl of Lindsay	Germany/Canada
1996	
Right hon. Michael Forsyth	USA/Canada
The Earl of Lindsay	France
Northern Ireland Office	
1994	
Tim Smith	Belgium/USA
1995	
Baroness Denton	Belgium/Canada/USA/Hong Kong/Japan/France/Italy/Singapore
1996	
Baroness Denton	Canada/Netherlands/France/USA/Japan/Korea/Indonesia

HEALTH

GP Fundholders

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on the NHS summarised accounts, 1994–95, in respect of how many cases the use of general practitioners' fundholder savings has been *(a)* outside the scope of the regulations since the inception of the fundholding scheme and *(b)* outside the scope of the regulations, in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95. [23062]

Mr. Malone: Two such cases have been formally identified, one by the Audit Commission and the other by a regional health authority.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much general practitioner fundholders in each health authority area, by region, have spent on health care from outside the NHS, in each of the last four years. [29664]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* The information will be placed in the Library.

Health Authorities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the spending on pay and administrative costs of health authorities in each region in each year since 1991–92. [29400]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 8 November 1995 at column *974*, for spending on pay and administration costs of health authorities in each region for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94. The comparable information for 1994–95 will be placed in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff that are women, in his Department on 1 April. [30557]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table. The grades of staff in the national health service regional offices which became part of the Department of Health on 1 April are not comparable with civil service grades. A separate entry has been made for these.

Whole-time equivalents

	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Female percentage*
UG1	3	0	3	0
UG2	5	0	5	0
UG3	18	6	24	25
UG4	17	9	26	35
UG5	128	60	188	32
UG6	55	39	94	41
UG7	335	172	507	34
SEO	186	68	254	27
HEO	343	264	607	43
EO	361	436	797	55
AO	263	736	999	74
AA	117	225	342	66
NHS	372	570	942	61
Total	2,203	2,585	4,788	54

Staff out on secondment or on loan to other Government Departments, on maternity leave more than three months, or on unpaid career breaks/study leave are excluded.

Renal Services Review

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *68*, if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meeting in April 1996 with the National Kidney Federation about the national review of renal services; and when his Department's renal services review will be published. [30688]

Mr. Horam: I had a constructive meeting with the National Kidney Federation on 2 April at which its concerns about the provision of renal services were discussed. I was able to inform it that the national renal review, and purchasing guidelines for health authorities based on the review, would be published soon. The review and purchasing guidelines were published on 7 May.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans his Department has to consult patients in the contracting process in the implementation of the renal services review; [30219]

(2) if he will publish a timetable for the implementation of the renal services review; [30220]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure the recommendations outlined in the renal services review are fully implemented. [30221]

Mr. Horam: The renal review, which we published on 7 May, makes several recommendations about the development of services for patients with renal failure. On the same day the national health service executive published guidelines, EL(96)35, for health authorities drawing attention to the important issues raised in the review and advising how these might best be tackled. The majority of recommendations are being taken forward locally by purchasing authorities and national health service trusts in accordance with local needs and priorities which take account of the views of patients locally. Copies of the review will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions he has made for extra funding for renal services in the United Kingdom. [30222]

Mr. Horam: In England health authorities are given general allocations for hospital and community health services to purchase health care services for their resident population. It is for individual health authorities in consultation with the providers of services to decide the level and type of services purchased, taking account of local circumstances and national policies and priorities. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Staff out on secondment or on loan to other Government Departments, on maternity leave more than three months, or on unpaid career breaks/study leave are excluded.

Pressure Sores

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 May, *Official Report*, column *479*, if he will make it his policy *(a)* to collate statistics and *(b)* to establish estimated costs in respect of statistics in relation to the incidence of pressure sores among NHS hospital patients. [30212]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Health is seeking to reduce the burden of data collection by the national health service and rationalise data flows within the NHS and between the NHS and the centre. The collection of additional information on pressure sores would not be in line with this policy.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; which agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30568]

Mr. Horam: None.

Pharmacists

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the improvements in productivity of pharmacists in each of the last 10 years, together with the change in NHS payments to pharmacists for each of those years. [29577]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The table shows that amount of national health service payments to pharmacists in cash terms for the years 1985–86 to 1994–95. There is no overall measure of pharmacists' productivity. The number of prescriptions dispensed over the period is shown as one indicator of their NHS activity.

	Pharmacists' NHS payments amount paid[1]		*Prescriptions dispensed*	
Year	*£ millions*	*Year on year percentage change*	*Millions*	*Year on year percentage change*
1985–86	1,240.6	—	337.4	—
1986–87	1,401.8	13.0	350.8	4.0
1987–88	1,583.2	12.9	367.4	4.7
1988–89	1,743.5	10.1	370.3	0.8
1989–90	1,911.6	9.6	384.3	3.8
1990–91	2,068.8	8.2	391.5	1.9
1991–92	2,345.3	13.4	412.8	5.4
1992–93	2,634.1	12.3	429.4	4.0
1993–94	2,903.8	10.2	447.3	4.2
1994–95	3,148.9	8.4	462.2	3.3

[1] Amount includes net ingredient costs of drugs (i.e., excluding discount and including container allowance) and pharmacists' remuneration. Adjusted to account for payback and clawback of under/overpayment of pharmacists' remuneration in previous years.

Breast Screening Programme

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount the national health service breast screening programme spends on screening women aged 65 years or over; and what percentage of the total budget this is. [29676]

Mr. Horam: In 1994–95—the latest year for which figures are available—the national health service breast screening programme spent approximately £840,000 on screening women aged 65 years and over. This represents approximately 3.1 per cent. of the total expenditure of the NHS breast screening programme.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish how many women were tested or screened under the national health service breast screening programme as a result of self or GP referral for each year since 1992–93 broken down by age bands *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59, *(c)* 60 to 64, *(d)* 65 to 69, *(e)* 70 to 74 and *(f)* 75 years and over; [29677]

(2) how many women were tested or screened under the national health service breast screening programme as a result of first invitation or routine recall broken down by age bands *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59, *(c)* 60 to 64, *(d)* 65 to 69, *(e)* 70 to 74 and *(f)* 75 years and over in the last year for which figures are available. [29678]

Mr. Horam: The available information is shown in the table. Data for 1994–95 are provisional.

Breast screening programme: number of women screened by age and type of invitation.

Thousands

Type of invitation	*Years*	*Age 50–54*	*55–59*	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75+*
Self or GP referral	1992–93	7.7	6.7	5.8	13.0	4.1	1.1
	1993–94	7.4	7.0	5.7	13.4	4.9	1.2
	1994–95	9.0	7.4	7.0	19.3	[1](for age 65+)	
First invitation or routine recall	1992–93	317.3	312.4	283.4	29.8	1.1	0.1
	1993–94	324.2	314.4	291.1	29.9	0.2	0.0
	1994–95	337.5	320.8	280.7	10.4	[1](for age 65+)	

[1] Information not available by separate age bands for women over 65 for 1994–95.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per woman screened on the national health service breast screening programme. [29679]

Mr. Horam: In 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, the approximate cost per woman screened on the national health service breast screening programme was £27.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* those non-unitary local authorities in England with populations over 90,000 and *(b)* those unitary authority local authorities with populations under 120,000 (i) at present and (ii) following completion of the local government reorganisation. [30000]

Sir Paul Beresford: All county councils have a population over 90,000. The following district councils which are currently non-unitary, have populations over 90,000—using Office of Population Censuses and Surveys figures as at mid-1994. For those districts marked with an asterisk, either orders establishing unitary authorities have been made or draft orders have been consulted upon.

Luton* 180,848
Mid Bedfordshire 114,853
Bedford 137,001
South Bedfordshire 110,389
Bracknell Forest* 104,635
Newbury* 141,581
Reading* 138,503
Slough* 104,945
Windsor and Maidenhead* 137,781
Wokingham* 141,735
Aylesbury Vale 152,033
Chiltern 91,432
Milton Keynes* 188,447
Wycombe 162,588
Cambridge 113,009
Huntingdonshire 149,869
Peterborough* 158,654
South Cambridgeshire 123,563
Chester 120,622
Crewe and Nantwich 111,422
Halton* 123,727
Macclesfield 151,503
Vale Royal 114,695
Warrington* 186,749
Allerdale 96,125
Carlisle 103,335
South Lakeland 100,263
Amber Valley 114,451
Chesterfield 101,104
Derby* 230,473
Erewash 107,142
North East Derbyshire 99,180
East Devon 122,839
Exeter 104,537
Plymouth* 255,815
Teignbridge 114,088
Torbay* 122,990
Bournemouth* 160,139
Poole* 138,100
Darlington* 100,612
Easington 97,980
Sedgefield 91,405
Brighton* 154,942
Hove* 91,338
Wealden 134,936
Basildon 162,114
Braintree 123,648
Chelmsford 155,800
Colchester 149,621
Epping Forest 118,943
Southend-on-Sea* 169,948
Tendering 130,915
Thurrock* 131,368
Cheltenham 106,782
Gloucester 104,735
Stroud 106,271
Basingstoke and Deane 147,193
East Hampshire 108,209
Eastleigh 110,780
Fareham 101,764
Havant 119,430
New Forest 166,354
Portsmouth* 189,270
Southampton* 211,718
Test Valley 105,318
Winchester 101,848
Bromsgrove 93,968
Wychavon 104,577

Wyre Forest 97,239
Dacorum 134,231
East Hertfordshire 121,624
Hertmere 94,195
North Hertfordshire 114,303
St. Albans 128,739
Welwyn Hatfield 94,682
Ashford 94,765
Canterbury 133,859
Dover 106,938
Gillingham* 96,165
Gravesham 92,914
Maidstone 138,456
Rochester upon Medway* 145,463
Sevenoaks 109,919
Shepway 96,464
Swale 117,195
Thanet 125,301
Tonbridge and Malling 102,765
Tunbridge Wells 102,727
Blackburn* 140,147
Blackpool* 153,971
Burnley 90,530
Chorley 96,854
Lancaster 134,991
Preston 133,127
South Ribble 103,592
West Lancashire 110,226
Wyre 103,927
Charnwood 153,144
Hinckley and Bosworth 97,707
Leicester* 293,387
East Lindsey 121,431
South Kesteven 115,229
Breckland 112,171
Broadland 110,069
King's Lynn and West Norfolk 130,958
North Norfolk 94,300
Norwich 127,778
South Norfolk 104,467
Northampton 187,608
Harrogate 148,412
Scarborough 108,654
Ashfield 109,863
Bassetlaw 105,479
Broxtowe 112,170
Gedling 111,659
Mansfield 102,127
Newark and Sherwood 104,149
Nottingham* 282,440
Rushcliffe 102,967
Cherwell 127,456
Oxford 132,758
South Oxfordshire 121,823
Vale of White Horse 113,195
West Oxfordshire 94,981
Shrewsbury and Atcham 94,622
The Wrekin* 143,430
Mendip 98,017
Sedgemoor 101,443
South Somerset 148,298
Taunton Deane 98,158
Cannock Chase 90,789
East Staffordshire 98,972
Lichfield 93,619
Newcastle under Lyme 123,137
South Staffordshire 104,379
Stafford 122,458
Staffordshire Moorlands 95,072
Stoke on Trent* 254,197
Ipswich 114,065
St. Edmundsbury 92,840
Suffolk Coastal 113,163
Waveney 107,604
Elmbridge 119,717
Guildford 126,162
Reigate and Banstead 118,340
Spelthorne 91,448
Waverley 114,758
Nuneaton and Bedworth 119,142
Stratford on Avon 109,462
Warwick 119,758
Arun 134,328
Chichester 103,078
Horsham 114,324
Mid Sussex 125,109
Worthing 97,392
North Wiltshire 118,899
Salisbury 110,015
Thamesdown* 173,516
West Wiltshire 110,035

The following local authorities have populations under 120,000. Those marked with an asterisk are unitary authorities at present; for the reminder, either orders establishing unitary authorities have been made or draft orders have been consulted upon.

City of London* 5,222
Bracknell Forest 104,635
Slough 104,945
Hartlepool* 92,228
Darlington 100,612
Rutland 33,639
Isles of Scilly* 2,017

Energy Efficiency Voucher Scheme

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many households received voucher booklets offering discounts on energy efficiency products and services; [30497]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely take-up of 25 per cent. grants under the home energy efficiency scheme from the results of energy efficiency voucher scheme; [30498]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of households taking up one or more of the discounted offers under the energy efficiency voucher scheme. [30499]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The home energy efficiency scheme is the Government's major domestic energy efficiency programme and almost 2 million grants have been paid since it began in 1991. We expect a significant number of householders aged over 60 who qualify for HEES only on age grounds to take advantage of the 25 per cent. grant. This discount is a substantial incentive to adopt the energy efficiency measures under this scheme with its good reputation for quality. There is, however, no specific link between HEES and the voucher book scheme which was a separate promotion to encourage energy saving under the "Wasting Energy Costs the Earth" campaign.

For information about distribution and take-up of the voucher book I refer the hon. Member to answers given to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) on 22 November 1995, column *111*, and 23 April, column *63*.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the current level of capital receipts now held by each local authority as a result of the sale of council houses; and in what form such assets are currently held. [30447]

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of the amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts for each English local authority at 31 March 1995 was placed in the Library of the House in response to the question of Monday 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *85*, from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). About 90 per cent. of these receipts are held by authorities whose responsibilities include housing, but it is not possible to say how much of the total derives from the sale of houses.

Figures for the amounts of set-aside capital receipts are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which is reported to the Department, but which also includes amounts set aside from revenue.

Information on the way these assets are held is not available, but they are likely to be mainly invested in bank and building society accounts. Some may have been used temporarily to finance expenditure.

Bankside Power Station, London

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the expected date for completion of the demolition works at Bankside power station in London. [30469]

Sir Paul Beresford: Demolition works are taking place in two stages. I understand that minor works are being carried out at the moment to allow for the removal of the redundant boilers and electrical equipment. This work should be completed by the end of the summer. There will then be further demolition to remove extensions and additions to the original building to turn the power station into the Tate gallery of modern art. These works are likely to continue until April 1997.

Building Projects

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that Britain retains a leading position in the design and construction of innovative building projects. [30467]

Mr. Clappison: The Department is producing, jointly with the Department of National Heritage, new guidelines on architectural competitions which will help to promote high-quality building and design. It also has a research budget which provides funding towards an extensive programme of research into the built environment, including projects carried out on a collaborative basis with the construction industry. This programme covers the design, planning and carrying out of the construction process, as well as the products and materials used in it.

Rented Housing Starts

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new rented homes housing associations will be able to start in 1996; and what were the figures for each of the past three years. [29901]

Mr. Curry: The Housing Corporation has granted approvals for 27,000 new rented homes to be provided by housing associations using funding from the approved development programme during the financial year 1996–97. In addition, local authorities may also provide new rented homes using local authority housing association grant. Current indications are that an additional 11,000 social lettings will arise from LAHAG funding during 1996–97. Most of these approved schemes will be started during 1996–97.

These approvals will contribute significantly to the 61,100 new social lettings expected to become available during 1996–97 from housing association and local authority activities under the rental and home ownership programmes.

Figures for rental provision for the past three years are:

	ADP funded (approvals)	*LAHAG funded (completions)*
1993–94	45,781	7,159
1994–95	44,422	9,018
1995–96	26,516	11,394

Packaging Waste Regulations

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas where the proposed packaging waste regulations will be more extensive than the requirements set by the European Union directive on packaging waste regulations; and what are the reasons for such a policy. [29923]

Mr. Clappison: The EC directive on packaging and packaging waste (92/62/EC) is a framework directive which requires member states to put in place systems which they determine and which are intended to implement its provisions. The directive provides a single market framework for the free circulation throughout the European Community of packaging which meets certain essential requirements reflecting environmental and other considerations. It also contains environmental objectives,

including the need to achieve an overall recovery rate of 50 to 65 per cent. by the year 2001, with a minimum of 15 per cent. materials recycling per material.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment set out in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 7 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *73–75*, the Government have accepted industry's view that we should provide for the directive to be implemented by business-led schemes. The regulations which we hope to publish shortly for consultation will reflect that as well as the industry agreement achieved on 15 December 1995 on how the burdens might be shared between the sectors of the packaging chain.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate his Department has made of the cost for the packaging waste industry of complying with the proposed new packaging waste regulations; and what was the outcome of this assessment. [29924]

Mr. Clappison: A preliminary cost compliance assessment for implementation of this directive was set out in "Producer Responsibility for Packaging Waste—A Consultation Paper"—published in May 1995, a copy of which is in the Library. That assessment is currently being revised. I hope to publish it shortly for consultation alongside the draft regulations on implementation of the directive on the basis set out in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Eastbourne on 7 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *73–75*.

Pollution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many days in the last year for which figures are available pollution levels in British cities have exceeded limits set by his Department. [30474]

Mr. Clappison: A summary of exceedences of national and international guidelines and standards for pollution levels in air, water and soil across the United Kingdom is included in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Statistics No. 17, 1995", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons. The 18th volume of this report will be published in mid-June.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Allason: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many fraudulent claims for legal aid were pursued in 1995–96 and how much was recovered from claimants in the same year. [29927]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Following investigations carried out by the Benefits Agency into applicants' financial eligibility for civil legal aid, 29 cases were referred to the police in 1995–96. In the same period, the Legal Aid Board assisted police in their investigations into five assisted persons in receipt of criminal legal aid.

Amounts recovered in respect of these cases are not recorded separately from amounts recovered by the board from all assisted persons whose legal aid has been withdrawn for various reasons. The total amount recovered in 1995–96 from all assisted persons was over £1.4 million.

In 1995–96, the board also referred to the police seven cases of suspected fraudulent claims by solicitors. During the same period, £1,174,000 was recovered from solicitors in respect of costs which were either wrongly or fraudulently claimed.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each of his Department' agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide; and what were the results. [30046]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor has responsibility for four agencies: the Court Service, HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. As the question concerns a specific operational matter, the chief executives of the agencies have been asked to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about market testing.

Since April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, no market testing has been carried out.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 16 May 1996, regarding market testing carried out, the services provided and the results.

The Public Trust Office market tested the typing service in 1993. The proposal made by the in-house team was successful.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the market testing of services provided by the agencies for which he is responsible.

The Public Record Office has market tested the following:

1. Security services

The contract was awarded to the in-house bid team. Savings have amounted to £275,000 p.a. on pre-test costs of £1.14m p.a.

2. General office copying

It was decided, as part of the market testing process, that this service should be contracted out. The tender process did not produce a bid from the private sector which would have provided running-cost savings. The service remains in-house but is likely to be considered again within a proposed facilities management market test.

Additional services costing £1.79m p.a. have been subject to other efficiency techniques under the Public Record Office's Competing for Quality programmes, producing savings estimated at £174,500 p.a. for 1996–97.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 May 1996:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the results of market testing within HM Land Registry. I can supply the following information:

Service	*Result*	*Saving (£ per annum)*
Inspection Surveys	Retained in-house	31,500
Full surveys	Outsourced	167,250
Building maintenance/Estate management	Outsourced	44,000
Catering	Outsourced	398,000
Records management	Retained in-house	99,000
Security guarding	Part outsourced Part retained in-house	29,000
Graphic Design/Printing	Retained in-house	19,000
Legal services	Outsourced	4,000
IT procurement/Hardware support/Training	Part outsourced Part retained in-house	62,600
Local file management	Retained in-house	rising to 1,200,000
Local reprographics	Function disbanded Machinery outsourced	422,000
Finance—payments	Tender in progress	—
Payroll administration	Tender in progress	—
IT services	In progress	—
Finance—Receipts/Debts	In progress	—
Pensions administration	In progress	—
Transfers and removals	In progress	—

Probate Offices

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from trade unions, members of the public and public bodies concerning the proposed closure of probate offices. [30361]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 22 May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about representations received on the proposed restructuring of the Probate Service.

Written responses were received from the Lord Chancellor's Department Whitley Council Trade Union Side, the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC), and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS). 99 individual members of the public wrote in to make representations against the closure of specific Probate Sub-Registries and Probate Offices, of whom three lodged petitions bearing the signatures of a combined total of 696 people.

Nationally, replies were received from the Law Society and the National Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners. Locally, representations about the proposed closure of specific Sub-Registries and Offices were received from local authorities, local Citizens Advice Bureaux, local Law Society offices, solicitors, local branches of banks and other financial institutions, Family History Societies and local branches of Age Concern.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Rwanda

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received in respect of deaths caused by suffocation of inmates in Rwandan prisons; and what representations he has made to the Rwandan Government about conditions in Rwandan jails. [30334]

Mr. Hanley: The human rights field operation in Rwanda reports that five detainees died from suffocation during April. A further 37 died as a result of various illnesses. Our ambassador has made representations to the Rwandan Government about prison conditions, including these latest incidents.

Zaire

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current security situation in Zaire, with particular reference to the recent ethnic clashes in eastern Zaire. [30218]

Mr. Hanley: We are extremely concerned about the ethnic conflict in eastern Zaire and the recent reports of further killings. We make regular representations to all the Governments in the region to encourage a return to peace and stability.

Angola

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of breaches of the peace plan in Angola. [30330]

Mr. Hanley: As the UN Secretary-General noted in his report of 30 April to the Security Council, the level of ceasefire violations has diminished. However, the implementation of the Lusaka protocol has been delayed considerably, particularly in the key areas of quartering of UNITA troops and reaching agreement on the incorporation of UNITA personnel into the joint armed forces. The overall achievements still fall well short of what we and other members of the Security Council expected. We have made our dissatisfaction clear to both sides, and continue to use every opportunity to encourage progress.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace process in Angola. [30332]

Mr. Hanley: Implementation of the Lusaka protocol remains behind schedule. We have urged both sides to honour their commitments without delay. Dr. Savimbi's recent undertaking to quarter 50,000 UNITA troops by 15 June is a welcome step forward.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the sale of diamonds in international markets on behalf of UNITA. [30333]

Mr. Hanley: The sale of diamonds from Angola is a matter for the Angolan authorities, but we look forward to a time when Angola's natural resources are used for the benefit of the Angolan people as a whole.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list, for his Department's agency, what market testing has been carried out into the services it provides and what were the results. [30113]

The Attorney-General: The two agencies for which I am responsible have participated in the following market tests in the year 1995–96. Contracts were won by the agencies in the cases shown.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSD)	*Whether bid successful*
Provision of legal services	
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	No
Welsh Development Agency	No
Funding Agency for Schools (jointly with GPL)	Yes
ODA	Yes
Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales	Yes
Department for Education and Employment (Employment Service)	No
The Government Property Lawyers (GPL) Provision of legal services in relation to property matters	
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	No
Department of Transport	No
Highways Agency (London and Dorking areas)	Yes
Highways Agency (Exeter, Bedford and Manchester areas)	No
Funding Agency for Schools (jointly with TSD)	Yes
Welsh Development Agency	No
Inland Revenue	No
DSS/BA Estates	No
English Nature (Cumbria team)	No
Department of Trade and Industry	Yes

Public Order Offences and Assaults

Mr. Luff: To ask the Attorney-General if the Director of Public Prosecutions proposes to issue further guidance on charging standards relating to public order offences and assaults. [31053]

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers guidance to assist police and prosecutors select the right charge for people alleged to have committed public order offences. The charging standard will be implemented with effect from Monday 3 June 1996.

The main offences covered by the standard are those contained in part I and part III of the Public Order Act 1986. Those provisions penalise individuals or groups who use violence and/or intimidating behaviour. Special guidance is given in dealing with racially motivated conduct. Violent and/or intimidating behaviour which is directed at particular individuals or groups of individuals as the result of racial motive is liable to be dealt with under part I of the Act or other provisions of the general law with the motive being drawn to the attention of the court as an aggravating feature. On the other hand, conduct intended or likely to incite racial hatred is liable to be dealt with under part III of the Act.

The previous charging standard relating to offences against the person has been revised and will also be implemented with effect from Monday 3 June 1996. The revised standard contains guidance on the handling of cases of assault where the allegation is made by a person who was, at the material time, himself engaged in criminal activity, such as a burglar alleged to have been assaulted by the occupier of the premises concerned. Police and prosecutors must examine such cases by reference to all the surrounding circumstances including the suspect's state of mind and the common law and statutory provisions which permit the use of reasonable force in self-defence, the defence of another, the defence of property, the prevention of crime and the effecting of a lawful arrest. The difficulties facing someone confronted by an intruder or defending himself against attack must always be taken carefully into account but excessive force may not be used.

Copies of the charging standard relating to public order offences and the revised charging standard relating to offences against the person have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

TRANSPORT

Airport Development

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 March, *Official Report*, column *103*, what are the time scale and programme for the BAA investigation into less environmentally damaging options for runway development. [29569]

Mr. Norris: The study of options for a close parallel runway at Gatwick, initiated by BAA in April 1995, is expected to take two to three years to complete. The study is being conducted in three phases, examining in turn the technical feasibility of a close parallel runway, the supporting airport infrastructure that would be required, and finally the impacts of any options which have survived the first two stages.

Aircraft Movements

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *594*, on whom the responsibility falls to collate statistics on information concerning aircraft taking off or landing without an allocated runway slot. [30006]

Mr. Norris: The co-ordinator for the major UK airports, Airport Co-ordination Ltd., is required under the EC legislation to monitor the use of slots at the airports for which it is responsible. The ACL therefore maintains records of aircraft landing or taking off without a slot, by comparing slots it has allocated with data supplied by the airport operator on actual aircraft movements operated.

British Rail (Political Donations)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for each of the last five years, the amount paid by British Rail's Sapphire accounts system in respect of political donations, under its G/L code 686200. [30044]

Mr. Watts: Sapphire is a proprietary accountancy system used by all the British Railways Board-owned train operating companies, together with those in the private sector. The G/L code 686200 is a specific accounting code relating to donations to political parties. It was part of the original package bought from the manufacturer.

As a nationalised industry, British Rail is prevented by statute from making donations to political parties.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30130]

Mr. Norris: Between October 1992 and January 1996, the following services of the Department's agencies have been market tested, with the following results:

	Results
The Coastguard Agency	
Property Management	Contracted out
Messengers	Contracted out
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	
Personnel	Restructured
Accommodation	Restructured
Training	Restructured
Micrographics	Restructured
VED refunds	Restructured
Legal services	Restructured
Procurement	Restructured
Security	In house win
Stores and Waste Management	In house win
Messengers	In house win
Reproduction	In house win
Despatch	In house win
Telesales	Contracted out
Forms despatch	Contracted out
Internal Audit	Contracted out
Waste Collection	Contracted out
The Driving Standards Agency	
Driver test booking (subsequent restructuring)	In house win
Regional Property Management	Contracted out
Property Maintenance	Contracted out
The Highways Agency	
Graphics	Restructured
Winter maintenance operations	Restructured
Valuation Office Agency	In house win (trial area only)
Government Property Lawyers	In house win/contracted out
The Vehicle Certification Agency	
Microfilming	Contracted out
The Vehicle Inspectorate	
Training Finance and Management IS	Restructured
Roller brake maintenance	Contracted out
Weighbridge maintenance	Contracted out
Workshop	Contracted out
Building and Estate Management	Contracted out
IT Strategy	Contracted out
Library	Contracted out
Operational legal and casework	In house win

Bristol–Plymouth–Penzance Line

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the trans-European networks feasibility funding application for the Bristol-Plymouth-Penzance line; and if he will make a statement. [30400]

Mr. Watts: A bid for TENs funding support for a study into options for enhancing the main lines from Paddington to the west country was included in the UK's bid for 1996 TENs funding. The European Commission is currently considering the bids made by the UK and other member states, to draw up a proposed allocation for member states' consideration at the next meeting of the TENs financial committee, currently planned for 10 July.

Funds cannot be disbursed, however, until guidelines for the development of transport TENs have been adopted by the Council and the European Parliament. The draft guidelines are presently at the conciliation stage and an agreed text is expected to be available in mid-June and will then require separate approval by the Council and Parliament.

Traffic Area Offices

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement on the proposed closure of traffic area offices; and if he will make a statement. [30464]

Mr. Norris: I expect to make an announcement shortly on the future structure of the traffic area network.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the redundancy costs involved in closing the traffic area office in *(a)* Leeds, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Birmingham and *(d)* Cardiff. [30466]

Mr. Norris: It is not possible to give reliable estimates, as it would depend on how many and which staff were located.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those organisations or individuals who have made representations following the publication of the Curtis review, indicating those that were in favour of closing one or more traffic area offices. [30488]

Mr. Norris: Representations were received from those listed in the following table, following the publication of the Curtis efficiency scrutiny of the traffic area network. Of those who commented on proposals to restructure the traffic area network, no organisation specifically supported the closure of one or more offices. However, some supported moves towards a more centralised administrative system.

Representations received from	
Association of Chief Police Officers	Passenger Transport Executive Group
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)	Road Haulage Association
Association of District Councils	Mr. Peter Snape MP
Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers	Trade Union Side
Association of Transport COs (Scotland)	Transport 2000
BRAKE	Transport Tribunal
Cabinet Office	Traffic Commissioners
Confederation of Passenger Transport UK	Welsh Office
Council on Tribunals	
Freight Transport Association	
Lancashire County Council	
Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards	

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of his Department's overall budget is allocated to the traffic area office network. [30491]

Mr. Norris: Some 3.98 per cent. of the Central Transport Group's running cost budget net of VAT receipts.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office *(a)* the current number of staff in post, *(b)* the total running costs, *(c)* the accommodation costs, *(d)* the unit costs, *(e)* the service standard achievements, *(f)* the expiry date for the building lease and *(g)* the number of goods and public service vehicle operator licences held in that area. [30465]

Mr. Norris: The figures requested, for the financial year 1995–96, are in the tables:

TAO	*Staff*	*Total running costs* £	*Accommodation costs* £	*Lease expiry date*[1]	*Goods licences*	*PSV licences*
North Eastern	49.5	1,165,387	230,401	December 2006	18,600	1,260
North Western	57	1,353,055	302,371	June 1999	20,000	1,180
West Midland	36.5	1 053,446	306,980	September 2004	13,100	720
Eastern	43.8	1,282,071	341,054	June 1997	19,250	990
South Wales	24	609,025	191,280	2020	5,900	470
Western	49.3	1,185,500	269,897	2015	16,050	1,170
South Eastern and Metropolitan	46	1,154,923	218,794	March 1998	14,500	940
Scottish	45	1,115,746	267,802	2012	10,100	990

[1] In some cases there is provision to terminate the lease earlier.

Unit costs

TAO	*Unit cost goods vehicle operator licensing* £	*Unit cost public service vehicle operator licensing* £	*Unit cost bus registration* £
North Eastern	10.79	12.97	5.45
North Western	11.19	24.66	6.27
West Midland	13.26	26.27	6.81
Eastern	10.31	12.60	4.86
South Wales	14.64	26.69	6.25

Unit costs

TAO	*Unit cost goods vehicle operator licensing* £	*Unit cost public service vehicle operator licensing* £	*Unit cost bus registration* £
Western	13.12	24.66	6.16
South Eastern and Metropolitan	11.70	21.74	5.07
Scottish	17.15	21.54	7.27

Percentage

Service standards	*North eastern*	*North western*	*West midland*	*Eastern*	*South Wales*	*Western*	*South Eastern and Metropolitan*	*Scottish*
Goods vehicle operator licensing								
New, replacement and major variation without Public Inquiry within deadline	96	91	87	84	98	91	82	97
New, replacement and major variation with Public Inquiry within deadline	89	78	72	37	70	58	59	87

Percentage

Service standards	*North eastern*	*North western*	*West midland*	*Eastern*	*South Wales*	*Western*	*South Eastern and Metropolitan*	*Scottish*
Non-publishable variations within deadline	98	95	95	93	96	96	61	96
Refunds issued within deadline	100	90	97	85	98	96	86	99
Public service vehicle operator licensing								
New and Continuous applications without Public Inquiry within deadline	100	99	99	98	97	98	93	100
Variations without PI within deadline	100	99	98	100	98	94	82	100
New and Continuous applications with Public Inquiry within deadline	100	100	100	77	100	100	96	n/a
Variations to licences with Public Inquiry within deadline	100	n/a	100	n/a	100	n/a	100	n/a
Refunds issued within deadline	100	99	84	99	98	99	96	100
Bus registration								
Registrations processed within deadline	100	96	76	95	100	96	91	92

Heavy Vehicle Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of checks undertaken *(a)* on a weekend and *(b)* outside normal office hours in order to collate the statistics for the recently published report into the illegal operation of heavy goods vehicles. [30472]

Mr. Norris: There were 114 check sites used during the survey altogether. During the survey, 3,927 vehicles were checked. Six sites were used at weekends, where 210 checks were undertaken. On Monday to Friday, four sites were used entirely outside office hours and a further 80 were used partly outside office hours. In total, 880 checks were conducted outside office hours—between 0900 and 1700—on Monday to Friday. Therefore, in total, 1,090 checks were undertaken outside office hours.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the goods and public service vehicle operator licensing fees is transferred to Treasury funds. [30463]

Mr. Norris: All fee revenue is paid into the Consolidated Fund.

A2

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the A2 trunk road to accommodate the proposed Ebbsfleet station contained in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. [30831]

Mr. Watts: I have today announced that a scheme to widen the A2 between Cobham and Bean has been added to the national roads programme. The scheme will proceed in two phases. The first will complement work already in hand in association with the Blue Water park development and will result in additional capacity on the A2 in both directions between Bean and the A227 at Tollgate junction. The second will add a fourth lane in both directions between Tollgate and Cobham.

The first phase will be contained within the existing highway boundary. The other requires additional land.

Fares (London)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce a capping formula for London Transport fares. [30338]

Mr. Norris: None; I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 9 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *195–6*.

Rail Contracts

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list (i) all contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Eurorail Ltd. and *(b)* Eurorail CTRL Ltd. (ii) the date those contracts were awarded, (iii) the length of those contracts, (iv) the purpose of those contracts and (v) the total value of those contracts. [30339]

Mr. Watts: My Department has not entered into any contracts with either of these firms.

Ms Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list (i) all contracts awarded by Union Railways to *(a)* Eurorail Ltd. and *(b)* Eurorail CTRL Ltd. (ii) the date those contracts were awarded, (iii) the length of those contracts, (iv) the purpose of those contracts and (v) the total value of those contracts. [30342]

Mr. Watts: Union Railways has not let any contracts to these firms since it was formed as a separate company from the BR Board, but it did take over two contracts with Eurorail Ltd. from the British Railways Board rail link project group in connection with the channel tunnel rail link project. These are *(a)* for the provision of personnel on secondment, awarded in December 1990 and *(b)* for the provision of engineering design services, awarded in April 1992. Both contracts are still in force as at 21 May 1996. The commercial terms and value of the contracts are commercially confidential.

"Transport: The Way Forward"

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which recommendations made by the royal commission on environmental pollution in its 18th report have been specifically addressed in the Government's report "Transport: The Way Forward"; [29282]

(2) which recommendations made by the royal commission on environmental pollution in its 18th report have not been specifically addressed in the Government's report "Transport: The Way Forward". [29283]

Sir George Young: The Green Paper "Transport: The Way Forward" is a response to the national debate on transport, and as such it picks up most of the major points

made by the royal commission in its call for sustainable transport policies. It did not include a point by point response to the royal commission report.

I recently met the chairman of the royal commission to discuss how to take forward the debate, including further consideration of the commission's recommendations and its views on the Green Paper.

Central Railway

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent submissions he has received from Central Railway plc. [30678]

Mr. Watts: On Monday 20 May, an application was received from Central Railway plc for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992. I have decided that Parliament should have an opportunity to debate the principle of the proposals before a public local inquiry is held. A notice to this effect will appear in the *London Gazette* on Friday 24 May and in local newspapers along the route of the proposed railway as soon as practicable.

DEFENCE

Married Quarters

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland will remain in his ownership following the sale of the married quarters estate; and how many of these require upgrading to bring them to a satisfactory condition. [30002]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The sale of the married quarters estate does not involve properties in Scotland or Northern Ireland, where my Department owned 6,707 and 3,130 married quarters respectively at 31 March 1996. Of these totals, 159 in Scotland and 120 in Northern Ireland require work in order to bring them back into use.

The sale of the married quarters estate in England and Wales is being progressed as an integrated package and separating the two for the purpose of this reply would incur disproportionate costs. Figures for the sale have yet to be finalised, but I am able to advise that, after the sale, my Department will continue to own some 3,000 married quarters in England and Wales not included in the sale, and will continue to own the freehold on the properties in the sale which we will then take back for service use through underleases. Out of all the properties involved, some 1,700 require work to bring them back into use.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-level sorties were flown in the Borders tactical training area in each of the last five years. [30320]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of operational low flying movements authorised into the Borders tactical training area—TTA—in each of the last five years are as follows:

1991: 1,256
1992: 2,067
1993: 2,389
1994: 1,127
1995: 1,545

From July 1988 to September 1993, the Borders TTA was divided into east and west sectors. Movements for the two sectors were counted separately so that sorties that crossed the border between the two sectors generated additional movements. The figures for 1991 to 1993 therefore overstate the amount of activity in comparison with later years.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received on the subject of low flying in the Borders tactical training area in each of the last five years. [30321]

Mr. Soames: Since July 1988, when the Borders tactical training area—TTA—was extended to include what was at the time referred to as the western sector, complaints from that sector have continued to be counted in the totals for low flying area 16 within which the TTA lies, rather than being recorded as coming from the TTA. Accurate records of the number of complaints received from the Borders TTA as a whole are therefore not available and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost. Action is being taken to ensure that complaints from the TTA are identified as such in future.

Service Personnel (Cyprus)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total financial cost to date in providing legal aid for the three British military personnel who were charged and convicted of the manslaughter of a Danish tour guide in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [30206]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of defending the three soldiers convicted of the abduction and manslaughter of Miss Louise Jensen is, so far, about £260,000.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the terms of the Army legal aid scheme under which the legal expenses of the three British service men convicted of the manslaughter of a Danish tour guide are paid until all legal processes have been exhausted. [30201]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 20 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *52*.

Search and Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many search and rescue helicopters are currently based in the United Kingdom. [30204]

Mr. Soames: There are currently 19 RAF Sea King and seven RAF Wessex search and rescue helicopters in the UK. There are also four RN Sea Kings available for search and rescue duties, although search and rescue is not their primary role.

Retention Bonus

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the loyalty bonus scheme to the Royal Logistics Corps; and if he will make a statement. [30486]

Mr. Soames: The bonus referred to is, in fact, known as the retention bonus. The scheme is open to soldiers in the Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Artillery and Infantry, where the most serious manpower shortages currently exist. There are no plans at present to extend the retention

bonus scheme to any other corps, although the possibility of doing so in future is being examined. The retention bonus is one of a number of measures which have been taken to improve recruitment and retention.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amounts paid out in loyalty bonuses to soldiers since the introduction of the new bonus scheme on 1 October 1995. [30487]

Mr. Soames: The total amount of retention bonuses paid to soldiers between 1 October 1995, when the scheme was introduced, and 31 March 1996 was £2,248,000.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to call out any more Army reserve and Territorial Army personnel in support of the operations in the former Yugoslavia. [30819]

Mr. Soames: Approval has been given to call out up to 240 members of the Army reserve and Territorial Army to provide support to operations in the former Yugoslavia. They will report from 12 June 1996 to mobilisation centres for selection and a short period of training before deployment. All are volunteers.

Fixed Telecommunications System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the factors underlying the delay in the announcement on the Defence fixed telecommunications system. [30318]

Mr. Soames: An invitation to tender for the defence fixed telecommunications system was issued on 27 March 1995 and bids were received from four companies on 29 June 1995. Following evaluation of the companies' proposals, on 21 December 1995 two companies were invited to submit best-and-final offers—BAFOs. The BAFOs were received on 21 February 1996, and initial analysis showed that neither bid provided a basis for the MOD to proceed to contract. Discussions with both the companies have since taken place and they are due to submit updated proposal on 30 May 1996. The evaluation of the bids is a complex process, but it is hoped that the preferred contractor can be announced in the autumn. Subject to a satisfactory outcome of the final negotiations, a contract will be awarded early in the new year.

Nimrod Maritime Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod maritime aircraft are currently out of operational use at RAF Kinloss; what are the causes of the technical difficulties affecting the aircraft; what will be the total cost to public funds to repair these aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [30317]

Mr. Soames: As at 20 May 1996 there were no Nimrod maritime aircraft out of operational use at RAF Kinloss, nor were there any technical difficulties to give cause for serious concern. The estimated cost of the current support contract for maintaining the Nimrod maritime force is some £15 million for a five-year period.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by his Department in each of the last five years. [29431]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Ministry of Defence does not classify the thousands of contractors with which contracts are placed each year by the size of the contractor. Researching the answer to this question could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29461]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1108-109*. The 1996 edition of "UK Defence Statistics" will be published on 18 July and will provide details for 1994–95. Figures for 1995–96 will appear in the 1997 edition.

Larkhill Garrison (Electricity Supply)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost per unit of electricity purchased from Southern Electric plc to supply Larkhill garrisson in Wiltshire; what costs are attributed to the budget of consuming units who are nominated account holders; and what is the charge per unit levied on domestic occupants at Larkhill married quarters. [29868]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Electricity is supplied to Larkhill garrison by PowerGen under the terms of a contract awarded after a competitive tender process, the details of which are commercial in confidence. Costs are attributed to consuming units at the rate provided for in the contract. Current policy is, however, to charge other customers of publicly negotiated contracts of this kind a rate consistent with the published tariff of the local utility company. Domestic occupants of Larkhill married quarters are therefore charged the Southern Electric rate of 7.1p per unit.

Military Equipment Expenditure

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the outturn expenditure on military equipment during 1995–96. [30200]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The 1995–96 provisional outturn figures will be available in the public expenditure outturn White Paper to be published in July.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ministers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the overseas visits made by Ministers in his Department since 1992 indicating the places visited, the reasons for the visit, the cost to public funds and whether the Ministers concerned were accompanied by members of their family. [29958]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) on 1 April at column *62*. Since then, there has been one ministerial overseas visit. This was made by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), to The Hague on 1 and 2 April to discuss British and Dutch co-operation on drugs matters. He was not accompanied by any member of his family. The cost of the visit, including that of accompanying officials, was £1,093.

Mixed Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mixed prisons there are currently in England and Wales. [29718]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of mixed prisons there are currently in England and Wales.

There are currently five prisons that hold both male and female prisoners on the same site. These are Brockhill prison, Durham prison, Low Newton remand centre, Risley prison and Winchester prison.

London Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which London prisons overspent their allocated budget in 1995. [29719]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about which London prisons overspent their allocated budget in 1995.

Budgets are allocated for a financial year and adjusted periodically during the year. Provisional outturn figures for 1995/96 show that Belmarsh, Brixton, Holloway, Wandsworth and Wormwood Scrubs prisons exceeded their revised budget allocations for that year.

Young Offenders (Secure Units)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many secure units for young offenders there were within the Greater London area on 30 March. [29725]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of secure units in London for young offenders.

On 30 March 1996 there were two local authority secure units in the Greater London area approved by the Secretary of State for Health for the purpose of restricting the liberty of children.

One is at Stamford House in Hammersmith; the other one is at Orchard Lodge, Annerley.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has commissioned into the supply of illegal drugs to prison inmates by prison staff; and what plans he has to make a further evaluation of the extent of such smuggling and to adopt policies to reduce its occurrence. [29680]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about research which has been commissioned into the supply of illegal drugs to prisoners by prison staff; for further evaluation of the extent of such smuggling; and the policies which have been adopted to reduce its occurrence.

Centrally-held records show that no members of staff have been disciplined for trafficking in drugs since the introduction of the new Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline in July 1993. No research has been commissioned into the smuggling of drugs by staff and there are no plans to undertake any. Governors have the discretion to search staff on entry to the prison. Staff searches should also be a part of local searching strategies.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 10 May, *Official Report*, column *306*, (i) how many prisoners were tested for drugs in each month since February 1995; [29873]

(2) how many prisoners have tested positive for each type of drug, in each month since February 1995. [29879]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of prisoners tested for drugs and the numbers tested positive for each drug in each month since February 1995.

Tables setting out the number of tests conducted each month (Table A) and the numbers tested positive for each drug (Table B) under the random testing programme are attached. Results for other forms of mandatory drug testing are not yet centrally collated.

Table A: Mandatory drug testing random testing programme: numbers tested February 1995 to February 1996

Month	Number tested
1995	
February	207
March	319
April	324
May	239
June	342
July	317
August	191
September	521
October	717
November	1,254
December	1,698
1996	
January	2,316
February	3,304
Total	11,749

Checking of statistical returns for January and February 1996 has revealed a number of errors. Error checking continues and this data must be regarded as provisional.

Table B: Mandatory drug testing random programme: prisoners tested positive for each type of drug February 1995 to February 1996

Month	Cannabis	Opiates	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Benzodiazepines	Methadone	Barbiturates	LSD
1995								
February	70	5	0	0	3	0	0	0
March	111	5	1	0	5	0	0	0
April	106	14	1	0	12	1	1	0
May	75	8	1	0	2	0	0	0
June	95	11	0	0	7	0	0	0
July	110	11	2	0	6	0	0	0
August	53	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
September	142	36	8	0	18	0	0	0
October	242	66	7	0	29	4	0	0
November	236	58	1	1	22	0	0	0
December	273	74	6	1	30	3	0	0
1996								
January	618	148	5	0	60	5	0	0
February	791	178	6	5	82	2	2	0
Total	2,922	616	33	7	278	12	3	0

Because prisoners may test positive for more than one drug, the total number of drug positive is greater than the number of prisoners found positive. Checking of statistical returns for January and February 1996 has revealed a number of errors. Error checking continues and this data must be regarded as provisional.

Preston Prison

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what maintenance and modernisation work is to be deferred at Her Majesty's prison, Preston as a result of the reduction in the prison maintenance budget. [29758]

Miss Widdecome: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Richard Tilt to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about deferred work at Preston prison.

The maintenance fund for routine work at Preston prison has increased by 91 per cent this year from £91,266 in 1995/6 to £175,000 in the current financial year.

The only work to be deferred at this stage is the planned refurbishment of C wing which will now probably take place in 1997 instead of 1996 as originally planned.

Mr. Patrick Kelly

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Patrick Kelly was transferred from the United Kingdom to a prison in the Republic of Ireland; how many years of his original 25-year sentence remains; what assessment he has made of the financial implications for the United Kingdom of Mr. Kelly's detention in an Irish prison; and if he will make a statement. [29904]

Miss Widdecombe: Patrick Kelly was repatriated to the Republic of Ireland on Tuesday 14 May. Including time spent on remand before sentence, Mr. Kelly has completed three years and six months of his 25-year sentence. No assessment has been made of the financial implications for the United Kingdom of Mr. Kelly's detention in an Irish prison since these costs fall to the Irish authorities.

Prisons (Assaults)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of assaults, *(a)* by prisoners on prison officers, and *(b)* by prisoners on prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Doncaster during the financial year 1995–96; and what were the average rates for its public sector equivalent comparator group. [29820]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the number of assaults at Doncaster prison during the financial year 1995–96 and the average rates for its public sector equivalent comparator group.

As I stated in my reply of 23 April (col. 90), a report has been commissioned from consultants Coopers and Lybrand to assess the relative costs and performance of contractually managed prisons against comparable establishments in the public sector during 1994/5. This report will be published soon and I will write to you, following publication, with information on the periods mentioned in your Questions.

Durham Prison

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the governor of Her Majesty's prison, Durham is debarred from tendering for the courts and escorts service for the area covered by Durham prison in July 1997. [29855]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking why the governor at Durham prison has not been allowed to tender for the provision of the court and escort services for the area covered by Durham prison in July 1997.

Invitations to tender for the work—which covers the north of England rather than just the Durham area—were issued at the end of April. It is intended to award the contract in October or November this year and for phased implementation to commence in April 1997.

The contract will cover work currently undertaken both by the police and the Prison Service. It involves taking prisoners to and from court and their custody while at court. It does not constitute a part of the core duties and responsibilities of either police or prison officers, however, and has in the past often either been under resourced or has drawn valuable and highly trained personnel away from their core tasks. Contracting-out the work has led to higher standards of service to the courts and to lower costs.

In-house bids are time consuming and costly to mount, and would therefore only be undertaken if there was a reasonable prospect of achieving better value for money than contracting-out. This would be difficult to achieve in the case of court escorts. The geographic make-up of the contract area is intended both to stimulate and maintain private sector interest and offer the potential for economies of scale. Durham prison could therefore neither bid solely for its own catchment area nor the work that it currently performs. Any proposal would also need to incorporate police input to the activity.

In view of all these considerations, the decision was taken at the outset to exclude in-house bids and to contract out the work.

Advertising Standards

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent representations he has received about offensive or disturbing advertising on billboards; [30195]

(2) what monitoring he routinely undertakes of the Advertising Standards Authority. [30196]

Mr. Sackville: This year my right hon. and learned Friend has received four letters from Members of Parliament and one letter from a member of the public about offensive advertisements.

Government contracts with the Advertising Standards Authority are conducted principally through the Department of Trade and Industry, but my right hon. and learned Friend would not hesitate to approach the authority directly if there were grounds for concern over particular advertising material.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30122]

Mr. Howard: Services provided by Home Office agencies which has been market tested since their creation are as follows:

Prison Service

Operation of Manchester prison—won by the in-house bid team.

Operation of Buckley Hall prison—contract awarded to Group 4.

Warehousing and distribution, Prison Service stores at Branston—won by the in-house bid team.

Prison Service College, Newbold Revel, administration and maintenance—won by the in-house bid team.

The value of Prison Service business conducted under contract or service level agreement after a market test, exceeds £27 million per annum at 1994–95 prices. Estimated savings are £9.26 million per annum.

No market tests have been completed by the Forensic Science Service, Fire Service College or United Kingdom Passport Agency of the services that they provide to external customers.

British Citizenship

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons resident in the United Kingdom for over 20 years have been refused British citizenship in each year since 1979. [30399]

Mr. Kirkhope: This information is not available.

Maidstone Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications were made to undertake rehabilitation courses at Her Majesty's prison, Maidstone per month since April 1993; [30209]

(2) what has been the number of available places on rehabilitation courses at Her Majesty's prison, Maidstone per month since April 1993. [30210]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about (i) the number of available places and (ii) the number of applications to undertake rehabilitation courses at Her Majesty's Prison Maidstone per month since April 1993.

This information is not available in the form requested.

Sixteen places are provided monthly for prisoners on the sex offender treatment core programme. Records are not kept of how many applications have been received for the sex offender treatment

core programme. Since April 1993, 60 prisoners have attended the core programme and 81 have attended the extended programme. There are currently 38 prisoners waiting for a place on the core programme and 113 for the extended programme.

Records are not kept of how many applications have been received for the social skills course. This course lasts for two weeks and has 12 prisoners. In 1993 there were two courses; one in 1994; four in 1995; and so far in 1996 there has been one course, with three more planned.

The group work programme, which is run by the probation department in the prison, started in September 1995. There are an average of two groups running per month, which offer 8–10 places per group. There have been 912 applications for places on these groups. Since September 1995, 12 groups have run involving 108 prisoners.

One-to-one counselling sessions are run by the probation and psychology departments in the prison and by outside drug counsellors. Occasional courses on problem drinking, anger management and on relationships are also run. No record is kept of the number of applications for these sessions.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* parole applications and *(b)* successful parole applications were made at Her Majesty's prison, Maidstone in each month since April 1993. [30208]

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available centrally.

British Board of Film Classification

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department has given the British Board of Film Classification regarding its powers to review its certification of films for video release at the request of the film maker. [30243]

Mr. Sackville: Under the provisions of the Video Recordings (Review of Determinations) Order 1995, the British Board of Film Classification may, if it thinks fit, review any classification certificate issued before 3 November 1994. It is for the board to decide which video works should be reviewed in this way. There is no power for the board to review any classification certificate issued on or after that date.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the British Board of Film Classification regarding the application of section 4(a) of the Video Recordings Act 1984 in respect of harm to potential viewers to the certification of films containing gratuitous violence for video release. [30244]

Mr. Sackville: It is for the British Board of Film Classification to apply the classification criteria in section 4A of the Video Recordings Act 1984 to individual video works.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that independent scientific expertise is included in the membership of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [30247]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Criminal Cases Review Commission will have access to independent scientific expertise and will be able to request independent scientific tests and reports. It is important that the commission's members should reflect as wide a range of relevant skills and experience as possible, however, and we therefore have no plans to specify that scientific expertise must be included among the membership.

Forensic Science Advisory Board

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the establishment of an independent forensic science advisory board; and if he will make a statement. [30246]

Mr. Maclean: According to our records, representations from three organisations or individuals have been received about the establishment of a forensic science advisory board since the publication of the report of the royal commission on criminal justice.

Women (Protection Against Violence)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the protection available to women against violence and the threat of violence. [30257]

Mr. Maclean: The response to violence against women involves a number of Government Departments, whose work is co-ordinated at ministerial level. Effective action also requires the commitment and involvement of local agencies, working together to develop local preventive strategies, and to provide help and support to women who are victims of violent or sexual crimes. In order to encourage an effective co-ordinated response by local agencies, the Government published an inter-agency circular on domestic violence in August 1995. In addition, wide-ranging advice on personal safety is contained in the Home Office booklet "Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention", a copy of which is in the Library. The booklet also contains information on what men can do to help women feel more secure.

We will continue to take measures to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice; that victims receive the necessary emotional and practical support; and that steps are taken, through education and community initiatives, towards prevention in the long term.

Dr. Bayo Omoyiola

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons a re-entry visa was not granted to Dr. Bayo Omoyiola following a visit to the British Crown colony of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement. [30452]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have written to the hon. Member.

Merseyside Police

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effects on operations of the Merseyside police of the police grant report (England and Wales) 1996–97. [30504]

Mr. Maclean: None. It is for the police authority and the chief constable to determine spending and operational priorities on the basis of the resources made available to them.

Under-age Prostitutes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of police prosecutions, during 1995, against adults in England and Wales for having sexual relationships with prostitutes under the legal age of consent. [29995]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally.

John Mathews

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review exclusion orders that are currently in force in respect of the case of John Mathews; and if he will review the forensic evidence in the case. [30253]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The order excluding Mr. Mathews from Great Britain is due to expire shortly and is therefore already under review. All relevant considerations will be taken into account.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30057]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The annual staff budget of my Department's deregulation unit, which co-ordinates the deregulation activities of the Department, is £62,870. The unit has one full-time and one part-time member of staff dedicated to deregulation: one higher executive officer and one senior executive officer, respectively, who report to a head of unit. All three members of staff are career civil servants. None has been seconded from business or has had any direct experience of the private sector. Many other officials in the Department contribute to taking the deregulation initiative forward.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the documents which an employer will have to recognise, other than national insurance documents, under clause 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [29951]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* In cases where no documented national insurance number was available it is currently envisaged that any one of the following documents would provide an employer with a defence:

- birth certificates issued in the United Kingdom;
- passports describing the holder as a British citizen or as having the right of abode in the United Kingdom;
- certificates of registration or naturalisation as a British citizen;
- passports issued by a state which is a party, to the European Economic Area agreement;
- identity cards issued by a state which is a party to the EEA agreement and which describes the holder as a national of a state which is party to that agreement;
- passports or other travel documents endorsed to show that the holder has indefinite leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom;
- passports or other documents endorsed to show that the holder has current leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom and is not precluded from taking the employment in question; and
- certain letters issued by the Home Office or Department for Education and Employment indicating that the person named in the letter has permission to take any or specified employment.

Appropriate guidance about these documents will be made available to employers in due course. A telephone helpline facility will also be made available.

Repatriation (Irish Republic)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to decide on the application of Michael O'Brien to be repatriated to prison in the Irish Republic; when he received the latest response from the Irish authorities concerning Mr. O'Brien's sentence; and if he will make a statement. [29746]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The repatriation of prisoners between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland is governed by the Council of Europe convention on the transfer for sentenced persons. The convention requires the consent of both states involved as well as that of the prisoner concerned before repatriation can take place. Under the terms of the convention the receiving state must provide, among other things, details of how they intend to continue to enforce the sentence. In the case of Mr. O'Brien, information on this was provided by the Irish authorities on 14 February. The Government's long-established policy is not to agreed to prisoners transferring to other jurisdictions, save in exceptional circumstances, if, as a consequence, a prisoner is likely to receive a substantial reduction in time to serve. The information provided by the Republic of Ireland is currently under consideration and Mr. O'Brien's request will be determined as soon as possible.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he announced that Patrick Kelly was to be repatriated to prison in the Irish Republic; on what date Mr. Kelly was transferred from Northern Ireland to the Republic; and if he will make a statement. [29747]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Patrick Kelly was advised on Thursday 9 May of the decision to grant his request for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland. He was transferred there on Tuesday 14 May.

Prison Service (Education Programmes)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all education programmes in the Prison Service which have been dropped, in the last year for which the information is available; and if he will make a statement. [29295]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 22 May 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Prison Service education programmes which have dropped in the last year.

Courses which are provided in prisons vary constantly in response to local needs and priorities. Details of programmes which begin and end are not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The guidance on cost reductions which the Prisons Board has issued to governors makes it clear that emphasis should be on securing greater efficiency and that reductions in regime activities such as education should come as a last resort.

Where reductions do take place, governors have been advised to look at courses which have few prisoners and are costly to run and also those which do not offer worthwhile qualifications or are not of any clear use to prisoners in helping them lead law-abiding and useful lives after release.

Some prisons are likely to reduce expenditure on non-essential education courses, others will be maintaining their existing provision and some are planning to expand education provision.

Sentencing Statistics (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish for the last 10 available years the number of people *(a)* sentenced to terms in prison, *(b)* on remand and *(c)* the total of *(a)* and *(b)* for each the present boroughs of Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Conwy, Sir Dinbych, Sir Fflint and Wrexham. [28657]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 May 1996]:* The available information on persons sentenced to immediate custody is given in the table. Information for 1985 to 1988 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Comprehensive data about remands by petty sessional division are not available.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody within the administrative counties of Clwyd and Gwynedd 1984, 1989–1994

Petty sessional division[1]	*1984*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Within the County of Clwyd							
Berwyn	15	12	9	9	9	11	8
Colwyn	58	66	44	74	58	57	55
Dyffryn Clwyd	15	13	6	9	18	18	23
Flint	35	40	54	51	53	53	43
Hawarden	42	29	35	33	43	30	40
Mold	67	46	36	77	52	70	104
Rhuddan	117	101	86	76	74	100	114
Wrexham Maelor	167	140	136	162	113	121	123
Within the county of Gwynedd							
Aberconwy	101	99	76	105	56	56	53
Bangor	68	51	40	31	29	37	41
Caernarfon and Gwyrfai	33	36	35	43	30	38	29
Eifionydd and Pwllheli	6	30	24	12	4	26	17
North Anglesey	54	56	36	35	21	39	37
North Meirionnydd	17	22	8	10	10	7	10
South Anglesey	24	16	21	13	16	40	19
South Meirionnydd	14	36	21	24	11	12	20

[1] Includes persons convicted at the Crown court where the committing court was one of those listed.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Educational Selection

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding educational selection. [29109]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend receives frequent representations on this subject.

Employment (West Midlands)

17. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase employment in the west midlands. [29110]

Mr. Forth: The Department's aim is to continue to promote a free and flexible labour market to encourage employment in the west midlands region as elsewhere—a market that during the last three months has supported 20 overseas companies investing in the west midlands, bringing with them £188 million of investment and creating almost 1,300 new jobs.

Performance and Spending

18. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the relationship between performance standards and spending in schools. [29111]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The most important factors in school performance are leadership and the quality of teaching. There is no close correlation between performance and spending on education.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the correlation between performance and spending on education. [29090]

Mr. Robin Squire: The most important factors in school performance are leadership and the quality of teaching. There is no close correlation between performance and spending on education.

Unemployment

19. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the United Kingdom's record on reducing unemployment in relation to that of other major EU countries. [29112]

Mr. Forth: The UK, free of the burden of unnecessary regulation, has the lowest unemployment rate of any major European country—at 8.4 per cent., well below the 11 per cent. average throughout Europe.

30. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she next expects to meet her European counterparts to discuss current levels of unemployment in EU countries. [29124]

Mr. Forth: I expect to meet European Union Employment Ministers at the next meeting of the Social Affairs Council on 3 June at which we will be discussing a draft report to the Florence European Council on employment issues. We will also discuss the employment situation with Economic and Finance Ministers.

Departmental Amalgamation

20. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the benefits to date accruing from the amalgamation of the former Departments for Education and of Employment. [29113]

Mr. Robin Squire: The amalgamation has given us the opportunity to develop more coherent policies in critical areas such as lifetime learning and the framework of qualifications. We are beginning to see the first fruits of the new approach.

Higher Education Funding

21. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received from universities about higher education funding. [29114]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received a substantial volume of correspondence about higher education funding from the universities in recent months.

Failing Schools (Inner London)

22. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to assist failing schools in inner London. [29115]

Mr. Robin Squire: The primary responsibility for the improvement of failing schools lies with governing bodies and local education authorities. LEAs can provide financial assistance and advice; but, where necessary, the Government will transfer failing schools to the conduct of an education association.

Primary Education (Standards)

23. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what comparisons she has made between different local education authorities with regard to standards in primary education. [29116]

Mr. Robin Squire: The national measure of standards of achievement in primary education is performance in national curriculum assessments. The Government have announced their intention to publish next spring school level performance tables of achievement at key stage 2. It will be possible from these tables to derive a measure of the relative achievement of schools in different local education authorities.

Primary Schools (Class Sizes)

24. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she intends to take to reduce class sizes in primary schools. [29117]

Mr. Robin Squire: Decisions about class sizes are a matter for local education authorities and schools taking account of local circumstances and priorities.

Jobseekers Act 1995

25. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on progress in respect of the implementation of the Jobseekers Act 1995. [29118]

Mr. Forth: The jobseeker's allowance, as set out in the Jobseekers Act, is on course for implementation on 7 October 1996.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

26. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent on publicity in phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme. [29120]

33. **Mr. Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent to date on publicity in phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme. [29127]

Mr. Robin Squire: To date, some £1.1 million has been spent on providing information to parents and providers nationwide. It is not possible to break down expenditure between the phase 1 areas and the rest of the country.

Technology Grants

27. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the technology grants already awarded have gone to estate schools which are neither opted out, nor voluntary aided nor city technology colleges. [29121]

Mrs. Gillan: Since the specialist schools initiative was launched in November 1993, a total of £37.9 million has been allocated to the initiative up to the end of 1996–97. Of this total, £3.4 million has been allocated in capital grant and £5.3 million in recurrent grant to participating state schools which are neither grant maintained, nor voluntary aided nor CTC.

Secondary Modern Schools

28. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received urging the reintroduction of secondary modern schools. [29122]

Mrs. Gillan: Secondary modern schools continue to contribute to the diversity of educational provision in England. Some 160 schools are classified as secondary modern in the secondary school performance tables.

Information Technology

29. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to improve the competence of United Kingdom children in respect of information technology. [29123]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has given a central lead to the development of IT in schools since the early 1980s. Following Sir Ron Dearing's review of the national curriculum in 1993, we took the opportunity to make information technology a separate subject within the national curriculum. It is a mandatory area of study from five to 16.

Since 1990, financial support for IT in schools totalling over £132 million has been provided under grants for education support and training.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to publish the results of her Department's statistical survey into the provision of IT equipment in schools. [30225]

Mr. Squire: The Department plans to publish the 1996 survey of information technology in schools in November. A press notice listing a schedule for the publication of statistics, including the IT survey, was issued on 28 March 1996.

Teaching Standards

31. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she intends to take to improve teaching standards in schools. [29125]

Mr. Robin Squire: Following the Office for Standards in Education report on the teaching of reading in three London boroughs, my right hon. Friend has announced a number of additional measures designed to expose and tackle poor teaching standards—and to monitor the performance of local authorities and teacher trainers.

Full-time Employment

32. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to increase full-time employment in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [29126]

Mr. Forth: We shall continue with the policies that have enabled businesses to create more than 350,000 full-time jobs since autumn 1993.

Part-time and Temporary Jobs

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the number of employees who are in part-time and temporary jobs because they can not find permanent work and as to trends in the number; and if she will make a statement. [29128]

Mr. Forth: The labour force survey provides routine information on part-time and temporary work, and shows that the vast majority of part-timers are in permanent employment.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils, and for what period of time, have been excluded from schools in the Easington constituency in each year since 1992. [30214]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not available centrally.

The Department has this year started collecting figures on permanent exclusions through the annual census returns sent to all schools in January. Data on exclusions in the school year 1994–95 should be available by the early autumn.

Truancy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the recorded rates of truancy in schools in England and Wales *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in 1980. [30202]

Mr. Robin Squire: Rates of unauthorised absence for maintained primary and secondary schools in England for the 1994–95 school year were as follows:

Primary Schools

Percentage of half days missed: 0.5 per cent.

Average number of half days missed per absent pupil: 10

Secondary Schools

Percentage of half days missed: 1.0 per cent.

Average number of half days missed per absent pupil: 22

Equivalent information was not collected centrally in 1980.

Information on pupil absence rates in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Head Teachers

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to reform procedures for the appointment of head teachers; and if she will make a statement. [29107]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Teacher Training Agency to establish a national professional qualification for headship—NPQH. The Government anticipate that, in time, those being appointed as head teachers will be expected to have gained the NPQH.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the expenditure plans for teacher recruitment by the Teacher Training Agency for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [30453]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for the Teacher Training Agency. I will ask the chairman of the agency, Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member direct.

National Council for Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she received a report of the quinquennial review of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications; and if she will make a statement. [30788]

Mr. Paice: The report is being published today and copies are being placed in the Library. The review has informed our recent consultation document, "Building the Framework", on the future of NCVQ and School Curriculum Assessment Authority, in the light of Sir Ron Dearing's recommendations.

EU Trade Talks

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she plans next to meet European Community Ministers to discuss trade; and if he will make a statement. [30306]

Mr. Lang: I have been asked to reply.

My colleagues and I meet our European Union counterparts regularly to discuss a wide range of trade issues particularly those arising in preparation for the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Singapore in December.

SCOTLAND

Drug Users (Tayside)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of funding allocation by the national services division to Tayside health board for services for drug users in the current year; and what was the figure in each of the three previous years. [29756]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The level of funding allocated by the national services division to Tayside health board for drug misuse services in the four financial years from 1993–94 to 1996–97 is set out in the table.

1993–94: £265,000[1]

1994–95: £850,000

1995–96: £1,091,000

1996–97: £1,090,302

[1] The figure for 1993–94 does not include allocations for HIV drugs-related services which, since 1994–95, have been included in the general drug misuse allocations.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of funding allocated by Tayside health board in the current year and for last year to *(a)* Dundee drugs and AIDS project, *(b)* Wishart centre, *(c)* Body Positive and *(d)* Scottish drugs forum. [29757]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information, which has been provided by Tayside health board, is set out in the table.

	1995–96 Actual £	*1996–97 Intended allocations £*
Dundee drugs and AIDS project	[1]220,000	[3]158,500
Wishart centre	[2]42,000	20,000
Body Positive	—	15,000
Scottish drugs forum	60,000	42,000

[1] This amount includes non-recurrent funding of £82,000.
[2] This amount includes non-recurrent funding of £22,000.
[3] This amount includes non-recurrent funding of £20,500.

Scottish Drugs Forum

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of core funding provided by the Scottish Office to the Scottish drugs forum in the current year and in 1995–96. [29731]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The core funding provided by the Scottish Office to the Scottish drugs forum for the two years in question is as follows:

Financial year	Total core grant £
1995–96	88,000
1996–97	150,000

Betaferon

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the arrangements adopted in each health board area in Scotland for the prescription of the drug betaferon to patients suffering from multiple sclerosis; and what estimate he has made of the number of patients in each health board area potentially able to benefit from this drug. [29732]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that his Department's guidance on the use of the drug betaferon for patients suffering from multiple sclerosis is being consistently applied in each health board area in Scotland. [29733]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: NHS circular MEL (1995) 73 issued on 16 November 1995 to all health boards and NHS trusts offering guidance in the context of their responsibilities to develop and plan local arrangements to manage the entry of beta interferon into the NHS.

The use of the drug for the treatment of patients suffering from multiple sclerosis is, in each case, a matter for the clinical judgment of the responsible medical practitioner.

Woodcot and Arduthie Hospitals

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure a full public consultation before the proposed closure of Woodcot and Arduthie hospitals in Grampian, and that the award of the contract for the replacement hospital is announced before the consultation is completed. [29734]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Public consultation carried out by Grampian health board through the local health council between June and September 1995 established strong support for a new hospital in Kincardineshire to replace the two existing old and unsuitable facilities. I look forward to learning the outcome of the tendering exercise currently being undertaken by the health board, and I will wish to be satisfied that any proposals put forward for an alternative model of service provision represent an improvement on what exists at present before I agree to the closure of any hospital.

Student Nurses

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the drop-out rate of student nurses in Scotland in each year of Project 2000 courses, for each of the last three years for which there are figures; and if he will make a statement. [29816]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. It gives the overall wastage rates for each year of training for intakes commencing during the fiscal years 1992–93 to 1994–95.

	Percentage		
Year of commencement	Lost during first year	Lost during second year	Lost during third year
1992–93	12.2	9.4	3.6
1993–94	9.6	7.5	—
1994–95	9.1	—	—

Note:
All losses are expressed as percentages of the original intake sizes at commencement.
Source:
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland.

Project 2000 courses were introduced in August 1992 in Scotland; therefore only one cohort have completed; their three-year training courses. A valid wastage rate cannot be calculated from one cohort. As Project 2000 becomes established, trends in wastage rates will become apparent. An evaluation of Project 2000 has been commissioned and the results will be known in early 1997.

Health Boards (Administration Costs)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his statement of 9 May on administration costs of health boards in Scotland. [29945]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Copies of my news release concerning administration costs of health boards in Scotland have now been placed in the Library.

Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the mechanisms which he employs for the acquisition of land for the provision of smallholdings under the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919. [30506]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: No land has been acquired under the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919 since 1947.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions the provisions of the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919 have been used for the provision of smallholdings since 1966; and in each case what was the date and the location. [30507]

Mr. Robertson: The Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919 provisions for the creation of small holdings have not been used since 1966.

Health Boards (Shields Report)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to publish the Shields report on the role and responsibilities of health boards in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [29944]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Shields report is to be published shortly. I will then place a copy in the Library.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the annual budget for his departmental

deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30067]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Scottish Office deregulation unit comprises one member of the senior civil service, one grade 7, two higher executive officers, one executive officer and two administrative assistants. The officers concerned are all career civil servants and none has worked recently in the private sector. These staff also perform other functions within the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department and for that reason it is not possible to assign a specific cost to their deregulation activities.

Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he plans to issue guidelines relating to the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; [28470]

(2) if local authorities in Scotland will be eligible for grants during 1996–97 under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 action scheme; and if he will make a statement. [28471]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 9 May 1996]:* Guidance on the operation of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 will be issued to Scottish local authorities, following consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, later this year. It is expected that the Act will be brought into force in Scotland in 1997.

While Scottish local authorities are eligible to apply for assistance under the Energy Saving Trust Home Energy Conservation Act demonstration project, if they meet the criteria for the scheme, it is more likely to be of interest to Scottish authorities in 1997–98.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits made by all Ministers of his Department since 1990, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visit, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present. [17498]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Details of overseas visits as from 1 January 1991 are listed in the table. Information before 1991 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Non-ministerial members of the delegations have not been named as it is not normal practice to do so. They were in attendance to provide support for Ministers.

Visits since 1 January 1991

Date	*Place*	*Reason*	*Delegation*
1991			
25 March	Brussels	Agriculture Council	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
17–18 June	Brussels	Meeting EC Commissioners	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
10–13 September	Munich	Scottish Trade Mission	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
13–21 November	Japan	Inward investment promotion	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
1992			
20–23 June	Thessalonika	Europartenariat	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
12–19 September	Japan	Inward investment promotion	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
12–19 September	Boston	Inward investment promotion	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
1993			
12 February	Munich	Trade Fair and tourism promotion	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton and official
25–27 March	Florida	Inward investment promotion	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
6–8 June	Madrid	Trade Mission	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
17–18 June	Lille	Europartenariat	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
17–23 September	Jedda/Dubai	Trade Mission	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
20–21 September	Brussels	Agriculture Council	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
5–15 October	New York and Hong Kong	Tourism promotion	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Private Secretary and one official per visit
2–9 October	USA	Inward investment promotion	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
29 November–1 December	Brussels	Fisheries Council	Lord Fraser, Private Secretary and 3 officials
1994			
February	Oslo	Meet Norwegian Fisheries Minister and visit Winter Olympic Team	Sir Hector Monro and 2 officials
18 March	Holland	Tourism promotion	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Private Secretary and official
11–12 April	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Lord Fraser and Private Secretary
26–29 May	Crete	Criminal Justice Conference	Lord Fraser, Private Secretary and official
2–5 June	Corfu	Informal meeting of Ministers	Allan Stewart and official
9 June	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro and Private Secretary
8–10 June	Golansk	Europartenariat	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official

Visits since 1 January 1991

Date	*Place*	*Reason*	*Delegation*
14–15 June	. unich	Scotland/Bavaria Economic Forum	Allan Stewart and Private Secretary
8–9 September	Brussels	Anniversary of the liberation of Brussels	Secretary of State and Private Secretary
August	Canada	Visit Commonwealth Games	Sir Hector Monro and Private Secretary
24 September–1 October	USA	Inward investment promotion	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official
24 September–2 October	Japan	Inward investment promotion	Allan Stewart, Private Secretary and official
27 September	Brussels	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro and Private Secretary
24 October	Paris	SIAL Food Fair	Sir Hector Monro, Private Secretary and 2 officials
23 October	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro and Private Secretary
18 December	Brussels	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro and Private Secretary
22 December	Brussels	Fisheries Council	Lord Fraser and Private Secretary

Visits since 1991

Date	*Place*	*Reason*	*Delegation*	*Cost* £
1995				
15–17 March	Rome	Forestry Meeting	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official	1,942.80
20–21 March	Brussels	Meet MEPs	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and official	1,956
31 March	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro, Private Secretary and 3 officials	2,610
14 June	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro, Private Secretary and 2 officials	1,440
26–31 August	Taipei	Trade Mission/Inward investment promotion	George Kynoch, Private Secretary and 2 officials	14,508
15–19 September	Helsinki	Inward investment promotion	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Private Secretary and official	2,309.13
24–30 September	Boston	Trade Mission/Inward investment promotion	George Kynoch and Private Secretary	8,294
4–5 October	Cologne	ANUGA Food Exhibition	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and 3 officials	2,017.66
8–10 October	Stockholm	Health Conference	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Private Secretary and 2 officials	3,029.81
17 October	Brussels	Meet with Commissioner Bonino UK Rep and MEPs	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and official	748.50
26 October	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and 2 officials	2,968
1–3 November	Washington	United Nationals meeting	Earl of Lindsay and Private Secretary	7,162
7–9 November	Oslo and Tromso	To meet with Mr. Olsen, Norwegian Fisheries Minister	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and official	2,582.40
8–10 November	Toronto and Ottawa	Attend Royal Winter Fair Agricultural Show and fact funding visit about Canadian film industry	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and official	7,246.83
24 November	Madrid	Tourism promotion	George Kynoch and Private Secretary	982
17–19 December	Brussels	EU Council of Ministers	Earl of Lindsay and Private Secretary	948
20–22 December	Brussels	Meet with Commissioner Bonino UK Rep and MEPs	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and officia	1748.50
1996				
5 March 1996	Brussels	Meet with Commissioner Bonino UK Rep and MEPs	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and official	748.50
8–11 March	USA	Film Initiative	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and official	10,309.10
1 April	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and official	2,444.06
17–19 April	USA/Canada	Tourism and Inward investment promotion	Secretary of State, Private Secretary and 2 officials	14,379.94
22 April 1996	Brussels	Meet with Commissioner Bonino UK Rep and MEPs	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and official	748.50
24 April	Brussels	Visit to Brussels Fisheries Exhibition	Raymond Robertson, Private Secretary and official	696.75
29–30 April	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and official	2,150.80
15–17 May	Cannes	Cannes Film Festival	Earl of Lindsay, Private Secretary and official	2,899.20

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on official hospitality by his Department and all associated agencies in the financial year 1995–96. [28576]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 May 1996]:* The total expenditure on official hospitality by the Scottish Office during the financial year 1995–96 was £82,978. In addition, the Scottish Office spent £34,680 on hospitality as part of the Government's contribution to the VE and VJ-day commemorations.

The actual expenditure on official hospitality during the financial year 1995–96 for each of the agencies associated with the Scottish Office is set out in the table.

Agency	*Outturn of expenditure* £
Scottish Office Pension Agency	973
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	2,063
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	3,059
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	215
Historic Scotland	5,362
Scottish Courts Service	2,502
Scottish Prisons Service	6,824
Scottish Record Office	1,166
Registers of Scotland	6,249
Total	28,413

Cattle

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of *(a)* dairy and *(b)* beef cattle in Scotland at the latest available date. [29912]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

	December 1995
Total dairy cattle[1]	342,541
Total beef cattle[1]	664,587
Other cattle[2]	1,124,305

[1] The totals in each class include breeding cows, breeding heifers and other female cattle for breeding.
[2] Other cattle includes bulls for service and all other cattle not for breeding.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Exchange Rates (EU Funds)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the implications of recent changes in exchange rates upon the amounts Her Majesty's Government may receive from regional development funds and social funds from the European Union. [30166]

Mr. Eggar: Governments do not apply for grants from these funds; the Commission, following criteria laid down in Council regulations, makes a number of block allocations for each member state.

These allocations, like the whole of the EC budget, from which they are drawn, are denominated in ecu. Changes in exchange rates therefore affect the value in national currencies of the structural funds grants received by all member states.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business link chief executives have been dismissed from that post; and what proportion this is of the total. [30126]

Mr. Page: No business link chief executives have been dismissed.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many chief executives of business links are the first appointments to such posts. [30127]

Mr. Page: Sixty-six business link chief executives are first appointments to their posts.

Nuclear Privatisation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his Department's response to the second report of the Trade and Industry Select Committee on nuclear privatisation, HC 383, what estimates his Department has received from British Nuclear Fuels plc in respect of the extent of the future growth in the market for plutonium-based mixed oxide fuel. [30007]

Mr. Eggar: This is a commercial matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Export Controls

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives have been taken to date to implement the recommendations in Sir Richard Scott's report on *(a)* military and *(b)* dual-use equipment sales to Iraq in respect of the tightening of export controls and scrutiny of export licence applications; and if he will make a statement on the role of different Government Departments in executing the revised export control policy. [30008]

Mr. Lang: I plan to publish a consultative paper on export licensing procedures in the summer. The Government will consider fully all representations made in response to that paper before making proposals for a revised export control policy.

Research Establishments

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make a decision on the future of the public sector research establishments under the first tranche of the prior options review; and if he will make a statement. [30323]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the timetable for the reviews on 26 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *421–23*, and made it clear that the results were to be considered by Ministers collectively.

The Government are currently considering the outcome of the first tranche of reviews. I expect an announcement to be made shortly.

British Energy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assumptions informed the adoption of a 135-year time scale for the full dismantling of British Energy's nuclear power generating plants; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the full dismantling of nuclear power generating plants could be undertaken in a shorter period; [30391]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *409*, what are the determinants of the future agreed strategy; and if he will make a statement. [30395]

Mr. Lang: Government policy on decommissioning is set out in the July 1995 White Paper "Review of Radioactive Waste Policy". This concluded that there are a number of potentially feasible and acceptable decommissioning strategies for nuclear power stations, including "safestore". British Energy's preferred strategy will be set out in the pathfinder prospectus. To ensure that operators' decommissioning strategies remain soundly based as circumstances change, they will be reviewed quinquenially by the Health and Safety Executive, which will consult the environment agencies. The agreements establishing the segregated fund provide for changes in the level of payments into the fund in the event that British Energy's agreed strategy changes.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements he has made of the assumptions and calculations used by BZW in its paper "The Cash Generator". [30455]

Mr. Lang: The research paper "The Cash Generator" was written by independent analysts from the utilities sector of BZW Research. It is one of a number of research papers by independent analysts on British Energy. The analysts at BZW Research are completely independent of the team from BZW advising the Government on the privatisation.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to underwrite future contributions by British Energy to its segregated fund in circumstances where *(a)* British Energy could not meet the payment and *(b)* British Energy became insolvent. [30344]

Mr. Lang: The agreements contain cross and parent company guarantees which make Nuclear Electric Ltd. and Scottish Nuclear responsible for each others' obligations and require British Energy to act as guarantor.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what would be the level of payments of British Energy to its segregated fund if the time scale for the full dismantling of the nuclear power generating plants was *(a)* 20 years, *(b)* 50 years and *(c)* 70 years after the end of production. [30346]

Mr. Lang: The level of payments into the fund are based on British Energy's expected costs of decommissioning its advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear power stations 70 years after the end of generation and 50 years after generation for the Sizewell B pressurised water reactor. Figures for other time scales are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the segregated fund would have preferential creditor status on the company's assets if British Energy became insolvent. [30345]

Mr. Lang: As with other parties with whom British Energy has contractual arrangements, the fund will be able to enforce its contractual rights against the assets of British Energy.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) to what extent British Energy's segregated fund will meet liabilities from the privatised assets; [30382]

(2) what proportion of the initial endowment towards the segregated fund of British Energy will be provided from public funds. [30381]

Mr. Lang: The initial endowment to the segregated fund will be paid for by British Energy, not from public funds. This endowment, and subsequent quarterly payments will be paid by the privatised companies.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the shortfall between total undiscounted liabilities of British Energy and the sum generated by the segregated fund will be met by British Energy revenues. [30335]

Mr. Lang: British Energy will be responsible for meeting all its liabilities.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leeds West, of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *409*, from what source intermediate-level waste and high-level waste disposal costs are to be funded. [30394]

Mr. Lang: All ILW and HLW disposal costs for ILW and HLW arising from the operation of British Energy's power stations and the treatment of spent fuel from these stations will be funded by British Energy.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the undiscounted liabilities of British Energy will be met by the segregated fund. [30337]

Mr. Lang: BE's accounts for the year ended 31 March 1996 have not yet been finalised. BE provided provisional financial information in respect of the year ended 31 March 1995 at an analysts' briefing on 4 March 1996.

The provisional financial information indicated that BE's undiscounted nuclear liabilities at 31 March 1995 were £14.3 billion, consisting of £10.3 billion for fuel cycle and £4 billion for decommissioning. The majority of the fuel cycle liabilities are covered by contracts. The segregated fund deals with all decommissioning costs except defuelling costs. As at 31 March 1995, the segregated fund arrangements cover just over 90 per cent. of the undiscounted decommissioning liabilities.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated annual cost for *(a)* each advanced gas-cooled reactor and *(b)* the pressurised water reactor of reprocessing after shut-down and stage 1 decommissioning. [30341]

Mr. Lang: This detailed information is a commercial matter for British Energy plc.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the undiscounted value of the liabilities of British Energy; and if he will give a breakdown of the constituent parts of the total. [30336]

Mr. Lang: Details of the undiscounted value of the nuclear liabilities of British Energy will be included in the prospectus.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the financial forecasts indicating when British Energy will generate income sufficient to meet the post-shut-down reprocessing costs and stage 1 decommissioning costs of the advanced gas-cooled reactors as they close. [30340]

Mr. Lang: This is a commercial matter for British Energy plc.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what public funds will be used to meet the liabilities arising from the assets of British Energy. [30383]

Mr. Lang: None. British Energy will be responsible for meeting all its liabilities.

Magnox

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, (1) pursuant to paragraph 8.21 of the nuclear review White Paper, Cm 2860, if he will estimate the extent to which sufficient funds will be *(a)* generated by the Magnox stations and *(b)* realised by the privatisation of the advanced gas-cooled reactors and pressurised water reactors to meet the cost of the liabilities which remain in the public sector; [30384]

(2) what is the undiscounted cost of the liabilities remaining in the public sector; and how those liabilities will be met; [30393]

(3) when the Magnox stations will exhaust their existing sources of funding including, income from generation and outstanding fossil fuel levy and cash and investments currently held on current assumptions and calculations; and when the Government expect to contribute to reprocessing waste management and decommissioning costs. [30385]

Mr. Lang: The undiscounted cost of Magnox Electric plc's nuclear liabilities will be shown in the company's annual report and accounts, which I understand will be published shortly. The sources of funding of these liabilities were described in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) on 10 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *294–96*.

The timing and amount of funding of these liabilities by Magnox and the Government are dependent on a number of factors. These include the level of Magnox's future income, which is dependent on among other things, interest rates and electricity prices, the potential for further improvements in the understanding and control of decommissioning costs and other nuclear liabilities, and the benefits to be derived from the proposed integration of Magnox with British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has reached a decision on the future of the BBSRC's agriculture and plant sciences institutes; and if he will make a statement. [30818]

Mr. Lang: Prior options reviews have been completed of the Institute of Arable Crops Research, the Institute of Grassland and Environment Research, the John Innes Centre and the Silsoe Research Institute. I am satisfied that the functions of these institutes are needed and that they should retain their separate existence.

They are currently constituted as distinct legal entities with charitable status but are regulated by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. Their staff are members of the research councils pension scheme and BBSRC carries contingent liability for staffing. They are consequently subject to public sector financial controls.

I have concluded that full independence from the public sector, with the greater freedom this will provide the institutes to direct their own affairs, would be a desirable option which merits further consideration. This will therefore by the subject of further work led by the Prime Minister's adviser on efficiency, Sir Peter Levene. The institutes would remain eligible to compete for research funding from BBSRC and other public sector funders. [30329]

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make an announcement on the current review of the research establishments under the control of the BBSRC.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the timetable for the reviews on 26 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *421–23*.

Four BBSRC institutes were included in the first tranche of reviews. These were the Institute of Arable Crops Research, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, the John Innes Centre and the Silsoe Research Institute. I expect an announcement on the outcome of these reviews to be made shortly.

Four further BBSRC institutes were included in the timetable. The reviews of the Babraham Institute, the Institute for Animal Health and the Roslin Institute are due to be completed by the end of July 1996. The review of the Institute of Food Research is due to be completed by the end of December 1996. Announcements on the outcome of each of these reviews will be made as soon as possible.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the outcome of the prior options review of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory. [30817]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have accepted the review team's recommendations that NWML should remain an executive agency of DTI.

In reaching this decision the Government took into account the advantages of maintaining the existing integration between NWML's technical and policy functions, for which support has been received from industry.

Central Laboratory of the Research Councils

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has reached a decision on the future of the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils; and if he will make a statement. [30814]

Mr. Lang: I announced to the House on 17 November 1995, *Official Report* column *10*, that the Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories, which together form the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils, were to be the subject of a prior options review.

The review found that the functions performed by the CLRC are needed and that it should remain in the public sector as a non-departmental public body of the Department of Trade and Industry, through the Office of Science and Technology. The Government are content to proceed on this basis while asking that further work on the involvement of the private sector should be carried out as described later. I am also satisfied that the current arrangements, whereby CLRC obtains the great majority of its income from competitively won contracts and service level agreements, bring suitable market forces to bear on it and that these should continue.

The Government have agreed with the recommendations of the steering committee for the review that the laboratory should work to achieve further reductions in its overhead costs, and that work should be done to put in place a sound, longer-term planning model between CLRC and its research council customers. In addition, I have agreed that the CLRC should be set targets for broadening its customer base, and that further work should be carried out to identify and overcome, where appropriate, any barriers to greater private sector involvement with the laboratory, and on potential private sector interest in operating the establishment. These matters will be investigated by my Department.

I believe that these steps will enable the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils to build upon the success of the first year of its existence and will ensure that it remains well placed to contribute fully to the science and engineering base of the UK.

Public Sector Research Establishments

Mr. Wiltshire: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on the prior options reviews of public sector research establishments. [30815]

Mr. Lang: I announced the timetable for the prior options reviews of public sector research establishments on 26 January, *Official Report* columns *422-23*. The reviews are being conducted in three tranches, with a view to the major part of the work being completed by the end of 1996.

The Government have been considering the outcome of the first tranche of reviews. Our objective is to ensure that the Government receive the best quality scientific and technical services, with the best possible value for money for the taxpayer.

An announcement on the Building Research Establishment was made on 2 April, *Official Report*, columns *163-64*, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs are today making announcements on a number of establishments for which I have responsibility:

Central Laboratory of the Research Councils
Institute of Arable Crops Research
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
John Innes Centre
National Weights and Measures Laboratory
Silsoe Research Institute

Announcements are also being made today by the responsible Minister for each of the following establishments:

Directorate of Fisheries Research
Fisheries Research Services
Forestry Commission Research Division
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency
Scottish Crop Research Institute

Decisions on other establishments will be announced as soon as possible.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current state of industrial relations between management and employees. [29119]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There has been an immense improvement in relations between management and employees in recent years, as shown by the 94 per cent. reduction in the strike rate since the 1970s. The Government's step-by-step reform of industrial relations and trade union law has undoubtedly contributed significantly to this improvement.

Enterprise Agencies (Employment Initiatives)

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on enterprise agencies in relation to employment initiatives. [29091]

Mr. Page: Enterprise agencies are independent local companies whose boards are drawn from local industry and the community. They offer a range of business services to new and established small firms including advice and counselling, specialist financial services, business skills training and the provision of managed workspace. A majority of enterprise agencies are partners in business link and are often local deliverers of training and enterprise council and business link services to start-up and micro firms.

Steelworkers

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure that there is a fair distribution of *(a)* Rechar, *(b)* Resider, *(c)* Retek and *(d)* Konver funds to address the needs of unemployed steelworkers. [29975]

Mr. Eggar: I will announce the allocations as soon as possible, after giving full consideration to the representations I have received from the hon. Gentleman and others.

Late Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 15 May, *Official Report*, column 495, when he expects to be in a position to state on what date his Department will be publishing the table of results of all Departments and their agencies for 1995–96. [30437]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* I refer to my answer of 15 May on this subject. The figures are currently being collated and I would expect to be able to announce a publication date shortly.

Export Credit Guarantees

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the top 10 recipients of export credit guarantees granted by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in each of the last five years. [30154]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about commercial relations between the Export Credits Guarantee Department and individual companies unless the relevant parties have agreed to this.

Coal Investments Ltd.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extra funding requirement needed by the Coal Authority as a result of the administrative receivership of Coal Investments Ltd.; and if he will make a statement. [30260]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the Coal Authority.

Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he expects to publish draft regulations to implement the environmental impact assessment directive 85/337/EEC for offshore oil and gas exploration activities; and if he will make a statement; [29584]

(2) when he gave an undertaking to implement the environmental impact assessment directive 85/337/EEC for offshore oil and gas exploration activities; what consultations he had undertaken with interested parties; and when that consultation period ended. [29587]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* The Government are committed to implementing directive 85/337/EEC in so far as it applies to offshore oil and gas activities and I intend to seek comments from interested parties on our proposals in the near future.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *526–28*; how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade, including unified grades, in each year in the regional offices from their inception. [29831]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The data requested are not available from the inception of regional offices. Records are available for the period since 1985 and are shown in the table, with the position as at 1 January in each year. Integrated Government offices were created out of regional offices on 1 April 1994. The figures for 1995 and 1996 reflect the number of relevant DTI officials in the integrated Government offices.

Data on the specialisms held by staff in the unified grades are not maintained historically, but the current position is shown in the table.

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*Current*
Science Group													
Higher scientific officer	2	2	3	4	5	6	5	6	4	3	5	6	
Senior scientific officer	8	7	8	8	8	6	6	5	4	4	5	4	
Professional and technology group													
Higher professional and technology officer	2	4	4	3	3	3	5	6	7	6	9	7	
Senior professional and technology officer	6	7	8	6	4	5	7	10	10	10	9	9	
Unified grades (with science or engineering discipline)													
Grade 6													2
Grade 7													7
Senior civil service													2

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, columns *526-28*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each of the unified grades in the headquarters division of his Department in each year since 1991. [29830]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Data on the specialisms held by staff in the unified grades are not maintained historically. The current number of officers in the headquarters divisions of the Department with a science or engineering discipline is 117 at grade 7 level, 23 at grade 6 level and 17 in the senior civil service.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, columns *526-28*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each

grade, including unified grades, in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991. [29833]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The table shows data for all agencies since 1991 with the position as at 1 January in each year for which relevant information is available. The environmental work of the Warren Spring Laboratory executive agency were merged with that of the Atomic Energy Authority in April 1994; the National Physical Laboratory became a contractually operated agency in October 1995; the National Engineering Laboratory executive agency was privatised on 1 November 1995; and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist executive agency was sold on 1 April 1996.

Historical data on the specialisms held by staff in the unified grades are not maintained, but of the Department's agencies, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory currently has two grade 7s and one in the senior civil service with a science or engineering disciple and the Radiocommunications Agency has 19 at grade 7 level, six at grade 6 and two in the senior civil service.

	Science group					*Professional and technical group*		
	Assistant scientific officer	*Scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer (development)*	*Senior scientific officer*	*Professional and technology officer*	*Higher professional and technology officer*	*Senior professional and technology officer*
Companies House								
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1993	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1994	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Insolvency Service								
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
1993	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
1994	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
1995	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Laboratory of the Government Chemist								
1991	66	63	63	0	33	5	2	6
1992	64	61	67	1	41	5	3	6
1993	49	60	69	1	38	2	4	3
1994	43	63	68	0	40	3	4	4
1995	32	60	64	0	35	3	3	4
1996	28	60	54	0	34	3	3	3
National Engineering Laboratory								
1991	14	21	67	0	50	17	6	4
1992	11	22	59	0	55	16	10	4
1993	9	23	57	0	54	16	10	3
1994	9	23	53	0	49	14	11	2
1995	5	21	37	0	34	12	8	2

Year	*Professional and technical group*							
	Assisted scientific officer	*Scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer (development)*	*Senior scientific officer*	*Professional and technology officer*	*Higher professional and technology officer*	*Senior professional technology officer*
National Physical Laboratory								
1991	57	87	133	0	111	7	8	14
1992	44	96	137	0	113	7	8	14
1993	33	86	144	1	111	7	8	15
1994	26	73	150	1	108	5	8	17
1995	32	71	161	1	100	5	6	17
National Weights and Measures Laboratory								
1991	0	2	0	0	1	4	9	7
1992	0	2	0	0	0	5	9	9
1993	0	1	0	0	0	6	10	8
1994	0	1	0	0	0	7	10	7
1995	0	0	0	0	0	8	10	7
1996	0	0	0	0	0	7	10	7

Year	Professional and technical group							
	Assisted scientific officer	*Scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer*	*Higher scientific officer (development)*	*Senior scientific officer*	*Professional and technology officer*	*Higher professional and technology officer*	*Senior professional technology officer*
Patent Office								
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Radiocommunications Agency								
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	17
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	20
1993	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	27
1994	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	26
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	22
1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	25
Warren Springs Laboratory								
1991	24	30	63	0	45	2	2	0
1992	27	34	59	0	51	2	2	0
1993	23	25	52	1	48	1	2	0
1994	16	22	48	0	44	1	1	0

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Retirement Pensions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in the United Kingdom currently *(a)* draw their state retirement pension at a post office and *(b)* have it paid into a bank or building society. [29724]

Mr. Heald: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many pensioners in the United Kingdom currently (a) draw their state Retirement Pension at a post office and (b) have it paid into a bank or building society.

As of 31 March 1996, the latest date for which figures are available, 6,105,653 pensioners collect their Retirement Pension at the post office and 3,126,053 pensioners are paid direct into a bank or building society account. A further 279,995 pensioners receive payment by payable order which subsequently will be paid into a bank or building society account. These figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Motability

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to clear the report of the National Audit Office into Motability and related matters. [30051]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 30 January, *Official Report,* column *735.*

Child Support Agency

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he received in the first three months of 1996, regarding the working of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [29726]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Ministers received 640 letters and representations from hon. Members on child support issues during the first three months of 1996. This compares with 969 received in the first three months of 1995 and reflects the improvements we have made to the scheme since then.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each of her Department's agencies, the market testing which has been carried out into the services and what were the results. [30133]

Mr. Burt: The information for the period up to March 1995 has been placed in the Library.

"Competing for Quality" results for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for the Department's efficiency plan. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 next steps review.

Benefits (Loans)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances loans, other than student loans, are counted as income when applying for social security benefits. [26851]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 29 April 1996]:* Money from a loan may be treated as income if it is a sum received regularly—weekly, monthly or even annually—and will be taken into account at an equivalent weekly rate.

Lump sums received as one-off loans will generally be treated as capital and will not affect benefit if a claimant's overall capital remains below the lower capital limit—£3,000 for most claimants or £10,000 for people in residential care or nursing homes.

Compensation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will exempt persons who successfully

claim compensation as a result of disability arising from asbestosis and other similar conditions from the compensation recovery scheme; [30388]

(2) if he will raise the small payments limit for the compensation recovery scheme; and if he will make a statement; [30389]

(3) if he will ensure that the costs of any community care or aids and adaptations required, arising out of an injury or illness, where such medical conditions result in successful claims for compensation, are taken into account in any compensation recovery undertaken by the compensation recovery unit; and if he will make a statement. [30255]

Mr. Roger Evans: Extensive consultation has taken place on the implications of changes to the compensation recovery scheme. That consultation is now complete. The Government are now considering whether any reform of the present scheme is appropriate and will announce their decision in due course.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the total cash value of all benefits paid out were means tested, for each year between 1979 and 1991. [29854]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

£ million

	1978–79	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*
Social Security benefit expenditure (a)	15,873	18,777	22,658	27,698	31,628	35,332
Means-tested benefits (b)	2,692	2,940	3,830	5,587	7,917	9,449
(b) Expressed as a percentage of (a)	17.0 per cent.	15.7 per cent.	16.9 per cent.	21.1 per cent.	25.0 per cent.	26.7 per cent.

£ million

Year	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*
Social Security benefit expenditure (a)	38,225	41,699	44,913	46,697	47,333	50,174	56,509	66,382
Means-tested benefits (b)	10,755	12,163	13,171	13,398	13,265	14,050	16,804	20,328
(b) Expressed as a percentage of (a)	28.1 per cent.	29.2 per cent	29.3 per cent.	28.7 per cent.	28.0 per cent	28.0 per cent.	29.7 per cent.	30.6 per cent.

Attendance Allowance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland over the age of 65 years were in receipt of attendance allowance in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1995–96. [29247]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Scotland, over the age of 65 years were in receipt of Attendance Allowance in (a) 1992–93 and (b) 1995–96.

The information requested is as follows:

At 31.3.93: 73,800

At 29.2.96: 109,600

(latest data available)

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the number of people in Scotland aged *(a)* five to 15 years, *(b)* 16 to 29 years, *(c)* 30 to 64 years and *(d)* over 65 years (i) in receipt of and (ii) refused disability living allowance mobility component at the higher and lower levels in (1) 1992–93 and (2) 1995–96; [29214]

(2) if he will list the number of people in Scotland aged *(a)* five to 15 years, *(b)* 16 to 22 years, *(c)* 30 to 64 years and *(d)* over 65 years (i) in receipt of and (ii) refused disability living allowance care component at the higher, middle and lower levels in (1) 1992–93 and (2) 1995–96; [29209]

(3) if he will list the number of people in Scotland aged *(a)* five to 15 years *(b)* 16 to 29 years, *(c)* 30 to 64 years and *(d)* over 65 years in receipt of the mobility and care components of disability living allowance in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1995–96. [29210]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the number of people in Scotland aged (a) 5–15 years, b) 16–29 years, and (c) 30–64 years and (d) over 65, (i) in receipt of and (ii) refused Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component at the higher and lower levels of the mobility and care components of disability living allowance in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1995–96.

Appendix A gives details of DLA mobility component.

Appendix B gives details of DLA care component.

Appendix C gives details of DLA mobility and care components.

Unfortunately the information for refusals is not available in the format requested, as it is not possible to give a breakdown of disallowances by component or component level. However I am able to provide the total figure for all refusals of DLA following new claims received at both Edinburgh and Glasgow disability benefit centres for both the years.

1992/93: 25,890

1995/96: 35,148.

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A

Age	Mobility components Higher	Lower
DLA Recipients in Scotland at 28 February 1993		
5–15	2,100	1,300
16–29	4,200	2,700
30–64	58,600	8,400
Over 65	35,300	1,000
DLA Recipients in Scotland at 29 February 1996		
5–15	3,900	3,700
16–29	6,600	6,200
30–64	95,300	20,500
Over 65	33,100	1,500

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Appendix B

Age	Care components Higher	Middle	Lower
DLA Recipients in Scotland at 28 February 1993			
5–15	3,100	4,200	200
16–29	2,300	3,700	900
30–64	10,600	13,600	12,400
Over 65	2,800	4,200	3,800
DLA Recipients in Scotland at 29 February 1996			
5–15	4,600	6,000	1,100
16–29	3,500	5,800	2,400
30–64	21,900	31,100	27,700
Over 65	4,400	7,500	5,100

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Appendix C

Age	Both components
DLA recipients in Scotland at 28 February 1993	
5–15	3,100
16–29	5,100
30–64	32,100
Over 65	9,900
DLA recipients in Scotland at 29 February 1996	
5–15	7,000
16–29	9,800
30–64	71,600
Over 65	15,600

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people in Scotland aged *(a)* 16 to 29 years and *(b)* 30 to 64 years, (i) in receipt of and (ii) refused severe disablement allowance in (1) 1992–93 and (2) 1995–96. [29213]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of severe disablement allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of people in Scotland aged (a) 16 to 29 years and (b) 30 to 64 years, (i) in receipt of and (ii) refused Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) in (1) 1992–93 and (2) 1995–96.

The information is not available in the format requested. The total number of people in Scotland who were in receipt of SDA as at 31 March 1993 was 34,920 and at 31 March 1996 was 41,205.

However a statistical sampling exercise was completed and the information derived is as follows:

	Aged 16 to 29	Aged 30 to 64
As at 3.4.93[1]	8,000	25,000
As at 30.11.95[2]	9,680	28,500

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

[1] These figures are taken from a 1% sample of all claims to benefit in Great Britain, and are rounded to the nearest thousand. Regional information is recorded and has been used to produce this data.

[2] The latest figures available are for 30.11.95. These are taken from a sample of the Pensions Strategy Computer System for Incapacity Benefit, and do not include a small number of cases which are not held on this system.

The number of people in Scotland who were refused SDA can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people is Scotland currently in receipt of *(a)* the care, *(b)* the mobility and *(c)* both components of disability living allowance have been awarded the benefit for life. [29211]

Mr. Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Scotland currently in receipt of (a) the care, (b) the mobility and (c) both components of Disability Living Allowance have been awarded the benefit for life.

The information requested is as follows:

	At 29 February 1996[1]
Care component	87,500
Mobility component	134,300
Both components	77,800

[1] Latest date available. Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Incapacity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland were *(a)* in receipt of and *(b)* refused incapacity benefit at (i) the short-term lower rate, (ii) the short-term higher rate and (iii) the long-term rate in 1995–96. [29212]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Scotland were (a) in receipt of and (b) refused incapacity benefit at (i) the short-term lower rate, (ii) the short term higher rate and (iii) the long-term rate in 1995–96.

The information is not available in the format requested, such information that is available is shown in the attached tables.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

1995–96	*Short term lower rate*	*Short term higher rate*	*Long term rate*
April	31,100	1,700	240,400
May	29,500	4,300	243,500
June	28,700	6,200	236,500
July	30,800	8,000	233,300
August	31,400	9,300	233,300
September	31,000	11,000	232,300
October	32,000	12,400	231,000
November	26,600	13,100	227,700
December	26,400	13,300	225,800
January	27,800	14,300	222,200
February	28,700	14,800	221,000
March	28,900	15,600	220,600

Data are provisional and subject to amendment.
Figures are not cumulative but a snapshot at the end of the month.
Figures are shown to nearest 100 cases.

Number of customers in Scotland disallowed incapacity benefit 1995–96

1995–96	*Short term lower rate*	*Short term higher rate*	*Long term rate*
April	—	2	—
May	—	13	—
June	—	452	—
July	60	190	492
August	104	216	529
September	118	267	381
October	153	452	518
November	160	436	726
December	134	255	530
January	164	375	1,010
February	157	333	1,154
March	147	324	1,255

Notes:

1. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.
2. Includes cases disallowed for own occupation test, failure to return questionnaire, failure to attend examination without good cause and found capable of all work.
3. Excludes cases disallowed on initial application for Incapacity Benefit as the contribution condition is not satisfied.
4. Figures for April to June 1995 were not broken down and are only available as a total of all three rates.

Source:

100 per cent. count of cases on the Incapacity Benefit system. Excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.

Disability Working Allowance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland were *(a)* in receipt of and *(b)* refused disability working allowance in (i) in 1992–93 and (ii) 1995–96. [29248]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Scotland were (a) in receipt of and (b) refused Disability Working Allowance (DWA) in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1995–96.

The information requested is not available in the format requested. Data is not available for 1992/93 as it has been destroyed in line with our current document destruction policy. Data for the period January 1996 to March 1996 will not be available until August 1996. However information is available for the calendar years 1993 and 1995 in the following table:

Number of customers	*1993*	*1995*
In receipt of DWA[1]	503	1,073
Disallowed DWA[2]	457	947

Data is provisional and subject to amendment.

Notes:

[1] Customers who have received DWA at some time during the year (i.e. if the award is renewed the customer is only counted once).

[2] Customers who have had DWA disallowed during the year (i.e. if a customer has had more than one claim disallowed, they are only counted once).

Source:

DWA Computer System all claims.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland were *(a)* in receipt of and *(b)* refused invalidity benefit in 1994–95. [29249]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Scotland were in receipt of and refused Invalidity Benefit (IVB) in 1994–95.

The number of people in Scotland in receipt of IVB on the last working day of each month is as follows:

	Number
April 1994	229,208
May 1994	229,761
June 1994	230,554
July 1994	231,819
August 1994	232,697
September 1994	233,850
October 1994	232,826
November 1994	234,889
December 1994	235,023
January 1995	236,565
February 1995	237,121
March 1995	238,918

Data are provisional and subject to amendment. Information on the number of people refused IVB is not held centrally. To obtain the information requested would require an examination of the clerical papers held in all BA benefit offices in Scotland to identify those customers who were refused invalidity benefit during the period in question. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits Agency Emergency Service

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants contacted the Benefits Agency out-of-hours emergency service for each of the last five years; and if he will break down the figures by *(a)* age and *(b)* reason for application. [29839]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many claimants contacted the Benefits Agency out-of-hours emergency service for each of the last five years; and if he will break down the figures by (a) age and (b) reason for application.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are not kept which show the age of the customers referred to the out-of-hours service or their reason for application. Also, statistics were not kept of the number of referrals to out-of-hours prior to 91/92.

However listed below is the number of referrals for the statistical years (ending October) 91/92, 92/93, 93/94 and 94/95. It should be noted that the term "referral" is defined as a contact by the customer or by a third party on their behalf.

Statistical year	*Number of referrals*
1991–92	21,709
1992–93	42,722
1993–94	47,994
1994–95	48,744

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to make available emergency financial provision to claimants following the proposed abolition of the Benefits Agency emergency service. [29838]

Mr. Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 21 May 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what proposals he has to make available emergency financial provision to claimants following the proposed abolition of the Benefits Agency emergency service.

As you will be aware I recently outlined the BA's plans for the future delivery of social security benefits based on the BA vision of "right money to the right person at the right time, every time".

It is against this background that the Agency has declined to review the need for the out of hours service and the London Emergency Office which provides a service to customers at night and weekends. A decision on the future of the service is expected during this year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the figures given in his answer of 14 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *1018*, for the amounts, at current prices, paid in *(a)* income support or its predecessor benefit and *(b)* housing benefit in each year since 1979, by region. [27846]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 2 May 1996]:* The available information is set out in the tables.

Value of income support/supplementary benefit at current prices

£ million

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Great Britain	6,063	7,053	9,871	9,930	9,329	10,431	—	11,378	11,307	10,963

Value of income support/supplementary benefit at current prices

£ million

DSS administrative region	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
North Eastern	1,613	1,536	1,811	2,109	2,582	2,416	2,346
London North	1,511	1,608	2,099	2,722	3,313	3,187	3,137
London South	1,434	1,505	1,924	2,423	3,104	2,945	2,801
Wales and South West	1,286	1,296	1,688	2,051	2,426	2,223	2,128
Midlands	1,625	1,620	1,895	2,330	2,852	2,671	2,600
North western	1,647	1,595	1,844	2,153	2,573	2,407	2,342
Wales	588	587	723	852	998	929	947
Scotland	1,109	1,084	1,243	1,409	1,610	1,529	1,479
Great Britain	10,226	10,248	12,504	15,196	18,462	17,377	16,833

Source: Social Security statistics 1979 to 1988 (income support/supplementary benefit annual inquiries). Income support statistics annual inquiries 1989 to 1993. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry May 1994–95.

Notes:

1. Figures prior to 1988 are from November/December of the year. Figures from 1988 onwards are from May of each year.
2. All expenditure figures have been rounded to the nearest million.
3. No regional figures are available for the years 1979 to 1988.
4. Figures are not available for 1985.
5. Cash values have been inflated by the GDP deflator at market prices so that the whole series time is expressed in 1996–97 prices.
6. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in 1988.
7. DSS administrative regions are based on boundaries which existed before the Benefits Agency was introduced in April 1991 and have been used for reasons of consistency.

Total housing benefit expenditure at current prices

	1983–84	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*
London	760	830	866	894	922	964	1,086	1,275
South East	643	663	690	712	676	650	698	822
South West	290	305	319	340	329	314	330	395
East Anglia	126	130	139	148	142	136	142	166
East Midlands	285	296	307	315	308	299	306	321
West Midlands	469	502	522	529	513	497	507	531
Wales	238	263	278	289	276	280	292	305
Yorkshire and Humberside	401	440	470	490	482	471	488	486
North West	579	608	652	677	679	677	711	755
North	319	345	372	385	374	376	387	383
Scotland	437	474	520	591	644	635	698	702
Total expenditure	4,547	4,855	5,134	5,369	5,346	5,298	5,646	6,142

Notes:

1. Expenditure has been rounded to the nearest million. Due to rounding totals may not tally.
2. Cash values have been inflated by the GDP deflator at market prices so that the whole series time is expressed in 1996–97 prices.

Source:

Department of the Environment: statement of local authority housing revenue account and claimed entitlement to housing subsidies and grant.
Welsh Office: statement of local authority housing revenue account and claimed entitlement to housing subsidies.
Department of Social Security: summary of claim FD3D\13 (Scotland and new towns) and FD3D\132 England.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people received in-work benefits in each year since 1980. [29156]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* Such information as is available is set out in the table. Individuals may be in receipt of more than one benefit at the same time and figures for individual years cannot therefore be totalled.

Number[2,3,4] in receipt of in-work benefits[1] 1980–95 (Great Britain)

	Family income supplement and family credit[6]	*Housing benefit and rent rebate allowance[5]*	*Rates rebate[8]*	*Community charge benefit and council tax benefit[8]*	*Disability working allowance[7]*
1980	88,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1981	115,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1982	146,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1983	190,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1984	204,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1985	201,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1986	202,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1987	221,000	n/a	n/a	—	—
1988	213,000	256,000	301,000	—	—
1989	303,000	219,000	"230,000	"100,000	—
1990	316,000	236,000	—	780,000	—
1991	347,000	255,000	—	518,000	—
1992	397,000	268,000	—	430,000	52
1993	489,000	288,000	—	321,000	2,793
1994	551,000	316,000	—	332,000	4,251
1995	608,000	n/a	—	n/a	6,039

Notes:

[1] Means-tested in-work benefits are defined as family income supplement, family credit and disability working allowance, plus housing benefit, rent and rates rebate, community charge benefit and council tax benefit paid direct to people with earnings but who are not on income support/supplementary benefit. Earnings for this purpose have been defined as employed or self-employed earnings.
[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand except for disability working allowance, where exact figures are quoted.
[3] Figures are for May of each year and refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
[4] Figures include estimates due to the data collection procedure in Scotland.
[5] Data on housing benefit and previous schemes providing financial assistance with domestic rents and rates cannot be broken down prior to 1988.
[6] Family credit replaced family income supplement in April 1988.
[7] Disability working allowance was introduced in April 1992.
[8] Community charge benefit—CCB—replaced rate rebate in Scotland for 1989 and Great Britain from 1990. CCB figures for 1989 refer to Scotland only; rate rebate figures refer to England and Wales only. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit from April 1993. Figures for council tax benefit exclude second adult rebate cases.

Source:

Social Security statistics 1980 to 1990.
Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.
Disability working allowance 100 per cent. count of claims.
Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample taken at the end of May of each year given—1990 to 1994.
Housing benefit management information system, 100 per cent. quarterly case load stock counts taken at the end of May for 1988 and 1989.

Income Support

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in relation to income support of pensioners of reducing the assumed income from savings of between £3,000 and £8,000 to £1 per week per £1,000. [28898]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* The estimated annual cost in 1996–97 is £60 million.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based upon date drawn from the 1991, 1992, and 1993 family expenditure surveys uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

2. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.

3. Adjustments to these estimates are made using data drawn from the May 1995 quarterly statistical inquiry for income support.

4. Pensioners are taken to be all cases where at least one member of a couple, or a single person, is aged over 60 years.

5. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

6. The estimate is based on assumed income of £1 per week for each £1,000 of capital held above £3,000 or part thereof.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of bringing the savings allowance for income support for pensioners into line with those for housing benefit and council tax benefit, and of setting the assumed income from savings above £3,000 to £1 per week per £1,000 for *(a)* income support for pensioners, *(b)* housing benefit for pensioners and *(c)* council tax benefit for pensioners. [28899]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* The lower and upper capital limits which apply in the calculation of income support are currently £3,000 and £8,000 respectively, and £3,000 and £16,000 in housing benefit and council tax benefit. For people living permanently in residential care or nursing homes, the lower and upper capital limits are £10,000 and £16,000 respectively in income support and housing benefit—from April 1996.

The estimated annual cost in 1996–97 of raising the upper capital limit in income support to £16,000 and reducing the assumed income from savings above £3,000 to £1 per week per £1,000 for pensioners on *(a)* income support is £220 million, *(b)* housing benefit is £140 million, and *(c)* council tax benefit is £80 million.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on data drawn from the 1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

2. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.

3. Adjustments to these estimates are made using data drawn from the May 1995 IS quarterly statistical inquiry for income support, and the May 1994 HB/CTB(MIS) for housing benefit and council tax benefit.

4. Pensioners are taken to be all cases where at least one member of a couple, or a single person, is aged over 60 years.

5. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

6. The estimate is based on assumed income of £1 per week for each £1,000 of capital held above £3,000, or part thereof.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received on his changes to the payment of mortgage interest for claimants. [19706]

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 19 March 1996, c. 362]:* Unfortunately, there was an error in my oral reply. The correct reply is as follows:

Our intention was that the system of add back should protect the benefit entitlement of existing claimants at the point of change when the standard rate was introduced in October last year. It was never our intention that add-back should provide permanent protection. Where Mr. Tickle's case is concerned I have caused further inquires to be made. I am told that he has a mortgage that is fixed up to a certain level and then variable above that level. It also appears that the system of add back is working as we intended. It provided Mr. Tickle with complete protection at the point of change, and is continuing to provide some protection.

Child Benefit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17, *(c)* 18 and *(d)* 19 years in receipt of child benefit attend (i) school, (ii) sixth form college, (iii) tertiary college, (iv) further education college and (v) the youth training scheme. [30139]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Child benefit data are not available on the nature of the education being undertaken, and education data have no regard to the receipt or otherwise of child benefit. The figures are therefore not directly comparable. However, child benefit is not payable for any young person undergoing a youth training course, and all entitlement ceases at the 19th birthday. Available data on the number of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds for whom child benefit is paid, and the number in education and training, are in the tables:

Number of children for whom child benefit is paid:

16-year-olds: 577,100

17-year-olds: 400,700

18-year-olds: 177,600

Educational establishments attended by 16 to 18-year-olds

	16-year-olds	*17-year-olds*	*18-year-olds*
Schools	246,000	175,000	19,000
Sixth form colleges	53,000	40,000	10,000
Tertiary colleges	35,000	30,000	13,000
Further education	125,000	112,000	74,000
Youth training	69,000	46,000	40,000

WALES

Abattoirs (Rendering)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the rendering capacity available to Welsh abattoirs; and if he will make a statement. [29608]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend and I have been closely monitoring the rendering provision for Wales and have listened carefully to the many representations from hon. Members, the farming unions, abattoirs and individuals.

We have strongly put the case for appropriate provision for Wales and officials are in constant contact with the Intervention Board which is operating the scheme.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services it provides and what were the results. [30128]

Mr. Hague: Cadw—Welsh Historic Monuments—has market tested the provision of its conservation repair service. The in-house bid was successful.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from voluntary bodies working in the anti-alcohol abuse field concerning the level of funding to Alcohol Action Wales in the year 1996–97; and which successor bodies he has nominated to provide continuation of anti-alcohol abuse advice. [30502]

Mr. Hague: I have received two representations from voluntary bodies expressing concern at the decision not to fund Alcohol Action Wales this year. The Welsh drug and alcohol unit will provide expert advice and practical support to the Welsh Office, health and local authorities and other statutory and voluntary bodies that are involved in tackling drug and alcohol misuse.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure on consultants in connection with the market testing of the materials management service, the contracts unit and the prescription pricing division of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. [30503]

Mr. Hague: Some £176,190 for materials management and contracting which was a joint exercise and £120,609 for prescription services. In addition, £15,736 has been paid for legal advice to the authority covering these and other activities included in the market-testing exercises.

Inward Investment Project Broadcast

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up an inquiry into the premature disclosure of the major inward investment project broadcast by the BBC on Friday 10 May. [30695]

Mr. Hague: I have already looked into the matter and do not believe that the source of any information was the Welsh Office or its executive agencies. Further speculation and publicity would not be in the best interests of Wales.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Performing Arts (Young Offenders)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the value of performing arts programmes for the rehabilitation of young offenders. [28696]

Mr. Sproat: This is a matter for the Prison Service and the Arts Council of England which decides its own funding policy.

National Lottery

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what has been *(a)* the number and *(b)* the amount of national lottery grants awarded by each of the national lottery boards in each English county, metropolitan authority and London borough; [29055]

(2) what has been *(a)* the number and *(b)* the amount of national lottery grants awarded by each of the national lottery boards in each parliamentary constituency; [29053]

(3) how many applications there have been to each of the five national lottery boards from each parliamentary constituency; [29052]

(4) how many applications have been made to each of the five national lottery boards by each English county, metropolitan authority and London borough. [29054]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not available. The Department of National Heritage is developing a new lottery database that will allow for these breakdowns to be made.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the projects so far accepted for funding by the millennium fund *(a)* by value and *(b)* by local authority area. [29284]

Mr. Sproat: The Millennium Commission has made 55 awards totalling £494,033,411. These awards cover a total of 1,145 projects throughout the United Kingdom. The information is contained in the table.

Figures for national lottery funds broken down by local authority areas are not currently available. The Department of National Heritage is developing a new lottery database that will shortly allow for these breakdowns to be made.

Announced	*Recipient*	*Region*	*Location*	*Amount £*
30 October 1995	Tate Gallery of Modern Art	London	Southwark	50,000,000.00
2 October 1995	The Earth Centre	Y & H	Conisbrough	50,000,000.00
23 February 1996	Millennium Stadium: S Glamorgan County Council/Welsh Rugby Union	Wales	Cardiff	46,000,000.00
11 September 1995	Sustrans: National Cycle Network	UK Wide	UK Wide	42,500,000.00
2 October 1995	The Renaissance of Portsmouth Harbour	SE	Portsmouth & Gosport	40,000,000.00
1 March 1996	British Museum: Great Court	London	London	30,000,000.00
15 December 1995	Queen's Park Football Club	Scotland	Hampden Park, Glasgow	23,000,00.00

Announced	*Recipient*	*Region*	*Location*	*Amount £*
11 September 1995	Changing Places: The Groundwork Foundation (21 projects)	UK Wide	UK Wide	22,100,000.00
23 February 1996	Middleton Botanic Garden Trust	Wales	Middleton, Llandello, Dyfed	21,700,000.00
22 December 1995	Millennium Seed Bank: Royal Botanic Gardens	London	Kew	21,547,500.00
22 February 1996	The Lowry Centre	NW	Salford, Greater Manchester	15,650,000.00
22 December 1995	Llanelli Borough Council: Llanelli Coast Park	Wales	Llanelli	14,500,000.00
22 February 1996	Mile End Park	London	Tower Hamlets	12,322,010.00
30 October 1995	Rochdale Canal Trust	NW	Manchester to Halifax	11,923,500.00
26 April 1996	21st Century Halls: ACRE-Action with Communities in Rural England (180 projects)	All England	All England	10,000,000.00
26 April 1996	Millennium Greens: Countryside Commission—250 projects	All England	All England	10,000,000.00
30 October 1995	National Museums of Scotland: SCRANS	Scotland	Edinburgh	7,474,200.00
30 October 1995	The Woodland Trust: Woods On Your Doorstep (200 projects)	UK Wide	UK: England and Wales	6,637,000.00
2 October 1995	Millennium Forest for Scotland (45 projects)	Scotland	n/a	5,750,000.00
22 February 1996	Peterborough Green Wheel	E	Peterborough, Cambs.	5,554,881.00
2 October 1995	Trans Pennine Trail	UK Wide	UK Wide	5,330,000.00
22 December 1995	Durham County Council: Turning the Tide	NE	Eastingdon/Horden	4,537,760.00
2 October 1995	Welsh Highland Railway Restoration	Wales	Porthmadog, Gwynedd	4,300,000.00
30 October 1995	Black Country Urban Forest	WM	Sandwell, Walsall, Dudley and Wolverhampton	4,247,540.00
30 October 1995	Pickaquoy Project	Scotland	Kirkwall, Orkney	3,700,000.00
22 December 1995	Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust	SW	Slimbridge, Glos.	2,810,195.00
18 December 1995	Belfast 2000	N Ireland	Belfast	2,640,900.00
18 December 1995	St. Patrick Visitor Centre	N Ireland	Downpatrick	2,551,775.00
26 April 1996	Church Floodlighting: Church Floodlighting Trust—400 projects	UK Wide	UK Wide	2,288,788.00
2 October 1995	London Zoo Conservation Education Centre	London	Regent's Park	2,200,000.00
26 April 1996	Kingdom of Fife Cycling Initiative: Fife Enterprise	Scotland	Fife	1,793,450.00
20 November 1995	National Wildflower Centre	Merseyside	Liverpool	1,668,500.00
26 April 1996	Weather Watch Discovery Centre	SE	Bracknell Forest Borough Council	1,500,000.00
11 September 1995	Countryside Access for All/Northamptonshire County Council	EM	Northants.	736,000.00
22 December 1995	Pensilva Village Hall	SW	Cornwall	713,000.00
18 December 1995	Giant's Causeway and Bushmills Railway	N Ireland	North Antrim Coast	700,000.00
20 November 1995	Clonoe Community Centre, Coalisland	N Ireland	Co. Tyrone	613,000.00
30 October 1995	Thames Salmon Trust	SE	Berkshire: The River Kennet	588,000.00
11 September 1995	Agnew Park Seafront Development/Wigtown District Council	Scotland	Stranraer	547,000.00
2 October 1995	The Courtyard Community Project	Y & H	Goole	462,000.00
11 September 1995	The Visions Centre	NW	Manchester	435,000.00
2 October 1995	Restoration of the Glan-Llyn Youth Centre	Wales	Gwynedd	390,282.00
26 April 1996	The Millennium Centre, Eastbrookend Park	London	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham	360,000.00
18 December 1995	Enterprise Leisure	N Ireland	Trillick	350,000.00
11 September 1995	Bennachie Community Centre, Insch	Scotland	Grampian	311,000.00
22 December 1995	Wokingham District Council: Millennium Bridge	SE	Wargrave	280,000.00
22 February 1996	St. Martha's Community Project	EM	Nottingham	243,600.00
2 October 1995	Meanwood Valley Urban Farm	Y & H	Leeds	175,000.00
11 September 1995	New Lock at Great Cornrad: River Stour Trust	E	Suffolk	167,890.00
22 February 1996	Grayswood Village Hall	SE	Grayswood, Surrey	150,000.00
22 December 1995	Ingleton and District Village Hall	NE	Ingleton, Co. Durham	150,000.00
20 November 1995	Church Community Hall	Wales	Sully, S. Wales	146,500.00
2 October 1995	Lawrenny Village Hall and Youth Hostel	Wales	Dyfed	131,170.00
20 November 1995	Moulsoe Millennium Hall	SE	Bucks.	126,000.00
2 October 1995	Larne Borough Council: The Gobbins Cliff Path (feasibility study)	Co. Antrim	N Ireland	30,000.00
Total				494,033,441.00

55 awards, 1,145 projects

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [28880]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* As at 15 May, 6,685 awards have been made, totalling over £1.54 billion. More than 80 per cent. of these grants have gone to charities or voluntary organisations and account for around half of all the money awarded.

The National Lottery Charities Board is distributing 20 per cent. of the proceeds of the national lottery exclusively to projects proposed not only by registered charities but by voluntary organisations and organisations with a philanthropic aim. The board has made 2,460 grant awards, totalling £159 million, to charitable organisations both large and small.

Canoeing

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the grant available from the Sports Council and other public bodies in support of canoeing in the year 1994–95, expressed in terms per capita of those participating in this sport; and what are the corresponding figures for the sport of angling. [29333]

Mr. Sproat: In 1994–95 the British Canoe Union received a grant of £320,000 from the Sports Council. A further £6,500 was also provided for canoeing schemes in awards from sportsmatch, a business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport launched by the Government in 1992 to increase the amount of business sponsorship going into grass roots sport and physical recreation. This represents a sum of £3.26 on a per capita basis for the estimated 100,00 people who take part in the sport. In 1994–95 Sports Council grants to the governing bodies of angling totalled £54,125. In addition to this, sportsmatch provided £42,250 in awards for angling schemes. This represents a sum of 3p on a per capita basis for the estimated 2.9 million people participating in freshwater and seawater angling in England and Wales.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the technical definition for canoeing in the Scottish/NVQ, for coaching. [30325]

Mr. Sproat: The awarding bodies forum has accepted the technical definition for canoeing, and it therefore meets the normal requirements for S/NVQs. In relation to health and safety, the technical definition was developed by the British Canoe Union following principles and procedures agreed by the forum, and it is for the BCU to review this definition on a regular basis.

Business Sponsorship

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the extent of business sponsorship of innovative arts projects and small arts bodies. [29932]

Mr. Sproat: A significant percentage of smaller arts companies have attracted business sponsorship. Based on statistics collected by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts and analysed by the Arts Council of England, I understand that some 51 per cent. of arts organisations with a turnover of between £10,000 to just under £50,000 were in receipt of commercial support during 1994–95. Innovative projects also continue to receive sponsorship from the business sector. Recent examples include Barclays stage partners and the Guinness ingenuity awards for pub theatre.

Arts Council

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she last met the chairman of the Arts Council; and what was discussed. [29933]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the chairman of the Arts Council on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues. Details of the discussions are not given.

Listed Buildings (North Frith House)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice she has received from English Heritage on whether North Frith house, Tonbridge, Kent, should be listed. [29736]

Mr. Sproat: English Heritage has advised my right hon. Friend that North Frith house should be listed. My right hon. Friend has decided to accept that advice and North Frith house and two bathing boxes in its grounds were added to the statutory list on 17 May 1996.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has in respect of the repair and refurbishment of museums and galleries. [29934]

Mr. Sproat: It is for those responsible for individual museums and galleries to make plans for the repair and refurbishment of their buildings. In 1996–97, the Department will provide over £205 million of grants in aid to 17 museums and galleries, plus a further £9 million to the Museums and Galleries Commission to help the wider sector, but these bodies each decide how much of their grant is to be directed towards repair and refurbishment. In addition, museum and galleries throughout the UK can apply for funds from the national lottery to refurbish and improve their buildings.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information she collates on the level of admissions to national galleries and museums. [29931]

Mr. Sproat: My Department collates figures on visitor numbers for each museum and gallery it sponsors. The latest such information was provided in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) on 8 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *170-71*.

National Vocational Qualifications

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects the Scottish/NVQ technical definition for *(a)* cricket, *(b)* windsurfing, *(c)* trampolining, *(d)* tennis, *(e)* rugby union, *(f)* rugby league, *(g)* rowing, *(h)* swimming, *(i)* sub-aqua, *(j)* orienteering, *(k)* netball, *(l)* movement and dance (recreational), *(m)* judo, *(n)* hockey, *(o)* gymnastics, *(p)* fencing and *(q)* basketball, to be produced. [30324]

Mr. Sproat: Judo, cricket, tennis, movement and dance, hockey, swimming, rowing, orienteering, netball, and sub-aqua are all at an advanced stage of development of their technical definition. Windsurfing, basketball, gymnastics, and fencing are at the forefront of S/NVQ development in coaching. Consequently, their technical definition as part of their approval for centre status. In due course, these sports will develop a separate technical definition, which is the current practice for new NVQs. Rugby union, rugby league and trampolining are not, at present, involved in working towards the S/NVQ process of developing a technical definition.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if groups not recognised by the Sports Council are permitted to submit contextual definitions within the Scottish national vocational qualifications for coaching. [30326]

Mr. Sproat: It is the responsibility of the sport concerned to develop the technical definition by consulting widely throughout the sport. Any non-recognised body would be able to contribute to this process through the recognised governing body. One of the criteria for recognising a governing body is that they are truly representative of the specified sport.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many sport groups have taken up NVQs; and of these how many *(a)* are live, *(b)* have approved technical definitions and *(c)* can deliver NVQs. [30328]

Mr. Sproat: Twenty-one sports have now developed materials to allow the technical content of S/NVQs to be assessed. This figure includes those sports with separate technical definitions and those where technical definitions were approved when they received centre status.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list, for each of her Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30118]

Mr. Sproat: In the period from the formulation of my two agencies until March 1995 they have market tested the elements of their services to the public listed in the table.

The "Competing for Quality" figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for our agencies' efficiency plans. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 next steps review.

Let by	*Activity*	*Name of successful bidder*	*Won by in-house bid*
1993–94			
The Royal Parks	Property maintenance Management	Tarmac Facilities management	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Kew Palace—Security Services	Royal British Legion	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace—Gardens Litter Clearance	SITA	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace	Initial Cleaning Service	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Kensington Palace Catering	De Blanks	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Kensington Palace Cleaning	Swanlux	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Banqueting House—Catering	10 companies used—selected by tender	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Banqueting House—Floristry	Nancy Ford	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Banqueting House—Security	RBLA	No in-house bid
1994–95			
Historic Royal Palaces	HM Tower of London—Window Cleaning	Metropolitan	No in-house bid
The Royal parks	Management of Car Parking Facilities	Apcoa Parking Ltd.	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	HM Tower of London—Commercial Guarding	RBLA	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	HM Tower of London—Costumed Interpretation	Past Pleasures	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	HM Tower of London—Garden Maintenance	Ground Control	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace—Catering	Town and Country	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace—Costumed Interpretation	Past Pleasures	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace—Recorded Tour Service	Acoustiguide	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Hampton Court Palace—Warding Services	Group 4	In-house bid unsuccessful
Historic Royal Palaces	Kensington Palace—Catering	De Blanks/Digby Trout	No in-house bid
Historic Royal Palaces	Kensington Palace—Cleaning	Securicor	No in-house bid

Concessionary Television Licence Scheme

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the concessionary television licence schemes currently operating in the United Kingdom. [29991]

Mr. Sproat: In addition to the accommodation for residential care concessionary television licence scheme, a reduction in the licence fee is available for registered blind people.

Football Pools Industry

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will assist the football pools industry from the receipts of the national lottery, with special reference to measures to assist those recently made redundant in the industry; if she will consult representatives of the pools industry regarding this matter; and if she will make a statement. [30475]

Mr. Sproat: It was recognised during the passage of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 that the pools companies would face a considerable challenge when the lottery was up and running. The Government have, therefore, made important changes to their regulatory and tax regime to help the pools firms compete effectively. These are:

- lowering the minimum age for play from 18 to 16;
- allowing pools companies to advertise on television and radio;
- allowing pools companies to roll over jackpots not won;
- allowing them to sell coupons in retail outlets; and, most important, reducing the rate of pools betting duty by 10 per cent.

A measure allowing the payment of football pools winnings in licensed betting offices is expected to come into force this summer. The Home Office is also considering further deregulatory measures proposed by the Pools Promoters Association and is consulting them and my Department about this matter.

All areas and sections of society are benefiting from the funds raised by the lottery for the five good causes. There are no current plans to change the beneficiaries or the method of distributing national lottery funds to allow the pools industry to benefit directly.

Advertising Standards Authority

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what monitoring she routinely undertakes of the Advertising Standards Authority. [30197]

Mr. Sproat: None. Matters relating to advertising controls in the non-broadcast media are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Arts, Sport and Heritage Funding

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the funding provisions for the arts, sport and heritage. [28770]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The areas for which I am responsible benefit from a wide range of funding. The partnership between public money in the form of central and local Government support and the lottery, and private money through sponsorship, provides well over £3 billion for arts, sport and our heritage. This partnership supports all our sectors on a scale never enjoyed before.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her departmental funding of the arts for 1996–97; what estimate she has of the funding of the arts by other European Union states; and if she will make a statement. [22720]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 March 1996]:* My Department's funding for the arts in England amounts to £194.25 million in 1996–97, of which £186.1 million is channelled through the Arts Council of England. The parallel figures for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices are £24.47 million, £15.49 million and £7.67 million, of which £24.47 million, £15.49 million and £7.15 million respectively are channelled through the relevant Arts Councils. Local authorities spend an amount on the arts similar to that provided by central Government through the four Arts Councils which in 1996–97 totals more than £233 million. On top of this, lottery awards of more than £400 million have been made so far, all of which are helping to improve the quality and increase the availability of the arts for everyone in the UK. It is anticipated that the arts' share of lottery awards will be in excess of £300 million this year. This adds up to public funding in the UK for the arts in excess of £775 million in 1996–97. No comparative figures exist for funding provision for the arts by other European Union member states.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [29362]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* No separate record of attendance at meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe is kept by the Department of National Heritage.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many firms with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50, *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 10 employees were used by her Department in each of the last five years. [29439]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* In the past, neither my Department nor its agencies have kept a specific record of a supplier's size. This historical information could therefore be obtained only by incurring disproportionate cost.

However, my Department and its two agencies are now recording the size of suppliers invited to tender and this information will be available in future.

Sports Broadcasting

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she intends to publish the results of her consultation document on sport on television. [28784]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate" was not a formal consultation document, but a discussion paper published to assist the public and parliamentary debate. The Government's conclusions are reflected in the clauses on listed events which now form part of the Broadcasting Bill.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *370*, what consultations she has had with the home rugby unions concerning the possibility of adding the Five Home Nations international championship to the schedule of listed events under the Broadcasting Act 1990. [30407]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* I have had several informal discussions.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1995–96. [29454]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* While the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, my Department paid a total of £10.1 million for goods and services in 1995–96.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if her Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29423]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* My Department and its agencies have made some use of bonds for building contracts in accordance with the advice on the use of performance bonds set out in the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 48, "Bonds and guarantees", copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses. The guidance makes it clear that bonds are not always necessary and are no substitute for considered judgments about the risks of a particular contract and the capabilities and financial resources of the available contractor. These factors will vary for each contract independent of the size of the contractor. My Department has made claim against only two bonds, one in 1994–95 by the British library project for approximately £100,000 and another in 1995–96 by the Royal Parks agency for approximately £4,000.

Credit Unions

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will introduce measures to ensure that the National Lottery Charities Board in Scotland is able to provide funding for credit unions. [29828]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* We have no plans at present to introduce changes to the legislation governing the National Lottery Charities Board. But, as with all legislation, we will keep the operation of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 under review, and bring forward proposals for change where we consider it right to do so.

Euro 96

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what mechanism was used to divide moneys made available to local authorities for Euro 96; and in allocating funds what consideration was given to the fact that the ground of Manchester United is located in the borough of Trafford. [29967]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Association of Metropolitan Authorities requested the funding and the Secretary of State agreed to provide it. The AMA identified in each case the local authority that would receive funding. In the case of Manchester, it has informed us that, although Old Trafford football stadium is in the borough of Trafford, the cultural events themselves will take place in areas under the jurisdiction of Manchester city council. Trafford council has a representative on the steering group which is overseeing that cultural programme.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what moneys have been made available to local authorities in respect of Euro 96; and for what purposes these sums have been granted. [29966]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage agreed in June 1995 to a request by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities for a contribution of £400,000 towards a core funding package of £800,000 for cultural events organised by the eight cities where Euro 96 matches are taking place. The Department has committed £100,000 in direct grant aid and a further £150,000 was earmarked within both the sportsmatch and Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts schemes. The AMA assured us this would enable funds of about £2.5 million to be generated from other sources.

In addition, the Sports Council is contributing £130,000, the Football Association is contributing £160,000 and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts has approved £78,000 for specific cultural events. The national music festival will also focus this year on Euro 96 and help promote events in the eight cities.

Premier League Tickets

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will refer the pricing regime of premier league football tickets for the 1996–97 season to the Office of Fair Trading. [30248]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* I have no plans to refer the ticket pricing regime of the premier league to the Office of Fair Trading as I have no evidence of either monopoly abuse or anti-competitive practice by clubs in the league.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 June 1996

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the objectives and policies which form part of the information society initiative and which rely on the use of personal data; and if he has discussed these objectives and policies with the Data Protection Registrar. [29694]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information society initiative brings together a range of existing and new support programmes into a coherent and accessible whole, with the overall objective of helping UK business take maximum advantage of information and communication technologies. It includes in particular programmes to raise awareness of the potential business benefits of using new technologies, and highlights some of the implications of doing so, including data protection and security issues.

No ISI programme relies on the use of personal data. Where personal data and received as part of the dissemination of ISI in areformation to interested parties, they are handled according to the relevant data protection regulations.

Crown Post Offices (Ayrshire)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are employed at each of the Crown post offices in Ayrshire. [28964]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand from the Post Office that the number of staff employed at each Crown post office in Ayrshire as at May 1996 is as follows:

	Number
Ayr	15
Kilmarnock	18
Irvine	16
Kilwinning	8
Saltcoats	9

EU Countries (Trade Deficit)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the countries in the European Community with which the United Kingdom currently has a trade deficit, indicating the amounts in each case. [30307]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on visible trade between the United Kingdom and other European Community countries is published by the Office for National Statistics in tables B13 (exports) and C13 (imports) of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Carpet Industry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many square metres of carpet were imported in each year since 1979; and from which countries these imports originated. [30360]

Mr. Oppenheim: Total UK imports of carpets are given in the table. A breakdown by country of origin or dispatch can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, since the introduction of the single market at the start of 1993, comprehensive information on the country of origin for imports is not available. Due to a revision in the system of classification, figures prior to 1988 are not strictly comparable with more recent ones.

UK Imports of carpets

Year	*Million sq. m.*
1979	30.7
1980	40.5
1981	50.2
1982	55.5
1983	66.2
1984	76.4
1985	86.2
1986	92.1
1987	101.4
1988	114.3
1989	125.7
1990	131.5
1991	121.6
1992	132.4
1993	94.3
1994	106.9
1995	108.3

Carpets are classified to Group 659, "Floor coverings, etc" of the Standard International Trade Classification (Revisions 2 and 3).

Mr. Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the output of the British carpet industry in each year since 1979; and what percentage was exported. [30362]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the table.

Output and exports of the British carpet industry

Year	*Gross output £ million*	*Exports £ million*	*Exports as a percentage of gross output*
1979	736	162	22.0
1980	659	145	22.0
1981	636	121	19.0
1982	629	121	19.2
1983	719	132	18.4
1984	782	152	19.4
1985	856	176	20.6
1986	943	178	18.9
1987	1,043	191	18.3
1988	1,226	189	15.4
1989	1,256	206	16.4
1990	1,266	221	17.5
1991	1,156	206	17.8
1992	1,103	211	19.1
1993	1,087	217	19.9
1994	n/a	247	n/a
1995	n/a	259	n/a

Source:
Office for National Statistics Annual Census of Production and Business Monitors MQ10.

Devon and Cornwall (Funding Applications)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated which indicate the comparative success of Devon and Cornwall in securing funding by making funding applications (i) together and (ii) individually. [30402]

Mr. Nelson: Published statistics on regional selective assistance provide a basis for some inter-regional comparison. This and other funding programmes are monitored and evaluated continuously.

British Business (Prospects)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to meet representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the prospects for British business. [30352]

Mr. Oppenheim: My right hon. Friend and other DTI Ministers regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a range of issues.

Lingerie

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of *(a)* domestically manufactured and *(b)* imported lingerie for the most recent year for which figures are available. [30359]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested can be obtained from the Quarterly Market Report QR12 on womenswear, in the UK market series, which is available in the Library of the House. This report is published by Taylor Nelson based on data collected by the Office for National Statistics.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; which agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30572]

Mr. John M. Taylor: From time to time the Department of Trade and Industry makes use of private detective agencies or investigators for such matters as process serving, but no central record is kept of the use of such people.

Lougborough Gas Research Centre

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of proposed job losses at the gas research centre Loughborough on current research programmes with his Department's funding. [31046]

Mr. Page: Current research and development programmes being funded by Government Departments will be completed within agreed contract terms and conditions and proposed manpower rationalisations will not affect this.

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has sought assurances from British Gas that job losses at the gas research centre at Loughborough will not prejudice current research and development programmes to improve gas safety. [31048]

Mr. Page: The Government expect British Gas to maintain sufficient research and development to meet its obligations for ensuring gas safety. British Gas has made it clear that the new research arrangements will not affect safety standards and that no key areas of research have been affected.

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the level of research and development funding by the Department of Trade and Industry to programmes at Loughborough gas research centre for each year since 1993. [31047]

Mr. Page: The total DTI funding paid for research and development projects conducted at British Gas's Loughborough research centre since 1993 is £1,236,034.

Ultra-sonic Gas Meter

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the value to date of export sales of the ultra-sonic domestic meter developed by British Gas. [31083]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not separately identified in the UK trade classification. This is a matter for British Gas.

British Energy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *593*, if he will publish the independent actuarial advice upon which his decision was made to set the level of British Energy's contributions to a segregated fund before *(a)* the date upon which advertising the sale of British Energy commences and *(b)* the date upon which the pathfinder prospectus is launched. [31190]

Mr. Lang: The advice, as stated in my answer of 17 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *593*, will be placed in the Library of the House when available. Appropriate details on the segregated fund will also be provided in the British Energy prospectus.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *593*, on what basis his Department made a decision on the correct level of contribution by British Energy to its segregated fund. [31191]

Mr. Lang: The Government based their decision on a number of factors, including British Energy's expected costs of decommissioning, the investment policy for the fund and the expected returns on the funds assets, and the tax rules that will apply.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much electricity was produced from wind turbines in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [30801]

Mr. Page: Electricity generated by wind schemes in the UK in each of the years 1990 to 1995 was approximately as follows:

Year	*GWh*
1990	1
1991	2
1992	26
1993	213
1994	337
1995	379
Total	958

I expect the numbers to continue to rise year by year as more wind farms come into operation.

Electricity Consumption

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the gross consumption of electricity in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [30761]

Mr. Page: Consumption of electricity in the United Kingdom was 291.45 TWh in 1992, 295.75 TWh in 1993 and, provisionally, 303.22 TWh in 1995. Electricity consumption grew by 3.9 per cent. in 1995, and by 1.3 per cent. per year on average over the last five years.

Anglia Television

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations are currently being undertaken into possible insider dealing in Anglia Television shares; and when these investigations are expected to be completed. [30835]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not the practice of the Department to comment on individual cases.

Offshore Installations (Pollution)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of the last five years *(a)* the number of releases of oil or chemicals from offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf, *(b)* the substance released and the amount of oil or waste for each escape and *(c)* the name of the installation and the operator in each case. [31102]

Mr. Page: It is an offence under the Prevention of Oil Pollution Act 1971 to discharge oil or any mixture containing oil into the sea from a pipeline or in the course of petroleum exploration and production in the United Kingdom continental shelf if that discharge is not the subject of an exemption granted in accordance with section 23 of that Act. In practice the operators of installations on the UKCS obtain exemptions to permit operational discharges. These exemptions are limited in accordance with international standards and require the operator of the installation to report any discharge made in accordance with the exemption. The amount of oil discharged in accordance with these exemptions is published in summary form in volume 2 of the annual energy report, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. The number of notifications make it impracticable to give this information otherwise than in summary form.

Companies licensed to carry out petroleum exploration and production on the UKCS are required by the terms of their licence to report to the Secretary of State any escapes of petroleum from the licensed area. A summary of oil spills reported to the Department of Trade and Industry is also published in volume 2 of the annual energy report. Again, the number of spills make it impractical to give details of each discharge.

The use of chemicals offshore is regulated by a notification scheme whereby licensees seek prior approval of the use of chemicals in exploration and production. Licensees are not required to report releases of chemicals from installations.

South-West Industrial Development Board

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 1 May, *Official Report*, column *545*, what was the potential conflict of interest of Mr. Roger Harris that caused him to absent himself from the south-west industrial development board meeting; and on how many occasions potential conflicts of interest have prompted similar action by Mr. Harris. [28754]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* The potential conflict of interest arose because KPMG, of which Mr. Roger Harris is a senior partner in the Plymouth office, was acting as auditors and grant consultants to Pendennis Shipyard Ltd. Mr. Harris has absented himself for similar reasons from discussions by the board on other occasions.

South-West Regional Office

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what remuneration was granted to Mr. Kenneth Holmes for his external services between the dates of appointment and termination of contact; what were the terms of this contact; for what reason the contract ended; who has since assumed responsibility for this role; and what checks have been made into their financial background and interests. [28736]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* A total of £238,868 was paid to Dellcourts Limited, a company owned and controlled by Mr. Holmes, in respect of his services between 5 February 1991 and 15 April 1995. By the end of this period, the relevant contract had run its full term and was being renewed on a monthly basis.

The external advisers currently assisting the Government office for the south-west on applications from companies for financial assistance are:

Mr. Rodney Pool of Riverdale Ltd.

Mr. Terry Scarrott

Mr. William R. Mountford

Checks on all three have been undertaken on the Insolvency Service and other departmental databases; they have also been asked to supply—for inclusion on a register—details of their financial and other interests in companies.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial interests in companies are held by the officials in his Department's south-west regional office. [28737]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 May 1996]:* The work of the Department's former south-west regional office is now performed by the Government office for the south-west which employs 230 officials. Like all public servants, they must not use information gained in their work to advance their financial interests or the financial interests of others, nor must they participate in the taking of any decision which could affect the value of those interests.

Competition Policy

Mr. Rowe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the implications for the Government's competition policy of the judgment of Mr. Justice Knox in the chancery division of the High Court in the case of Mid Kent Holdings plc. delivered on 30 April; and if he will make a statement. [29614]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* I have carefully studied the judgment delivered by Mr. Justice Knox on 30 April. In relation to the specific case before the court, he concluded that Mid Kent Holdings did not have a sufficient private right to obtain declarations that General Utilities was in breach of undertakings given to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 21 March 1991, and that in those circumstances he considered that it would be wrong for him to give a view as to whether there had been such a breach. Mr. Justice Knox also reaffirmed my discretion under section 93(A)2 to bring civil proceedings in respect of any failure, or apprehended failure, to fulfil an undertaking. I will ensure that future decisions take full account of Mr. Justice Knox's judgment in so far as it may be relevant.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if applications to his Department for financial assistance under the loan guarantee scheme are *(a)* considered and *(b)* offered by Department of Trade and Industry regional offices; if the value of the loan guarantee determines whether central or regional offices are responsible for the offering of this financial support; what other reasons require responsibilities to change between offices; and if he will make a statement. [30030]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* All applications for assistance under the small firms loan guarantee scheme, whatever their size, are considered centrally through the Department's loan guarantee section in Sheffield.

The scheme is a joint venture between the DTI and the lenders involved. It is the lender's responsibility to undertake the commercial assessment of a business proposal, and decide whether it is prepared to lend. Only if all normal bank lending criteria are met, other than the lack of security, should the scheme be considered. It is the lender who applies for, and receives, the guarantee.

It is the DTI's responsibility to consider whether the application meets scheme criteria. If so, the guarantee is issued.

Simplified arrangements allow certain lenders and their borrowers quicker access to the scheme where the loan amount does not exceed £30,000.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the newly recognised Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will enjoy the same agreements on trade that were in place for the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; what are the present arrangements for the duties on trade with Yugoslavia; if EUR1 certificates are applicable; whether former trading and duty arrangements between the European Union and Yugoslavia are being recognised by the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [30256]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The 1982 trade and co-operation agreement between the EC and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was abrogated in 1991 following the break-up of the country. In February 1992 the trade benefits of the TCA were re-introduced for Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina only. Trade sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were lifted in November 1995, but the preferences of the 1982 TCA were not extended to it. In accordance with the regional approach agreed by EU Foreign Ministers in October 1995, the EU will conclude new individual agreements covering trade with all of the successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including FRY, as and when the political conditions have been met.

Many industrial products and a range of agricultural products can be imported duty free from Croatia, Solvenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia, using EUR1 certificates, some within ceilings and quotas. Council regulations 3355, 3356 and 3357/94, as amended by Council regulation 3032/95, set out the arrangements applicable. These countries are also beneficiaries of the EU's agricultural generalised system of preference scheme, which grants preferential access to developing countries for many agricultural products. These trading arrangements are non-reciprocal. Duties on imports from FRY are levied at the most favoured nation rate. As FRY does not have preferential trading arrangements, EUR1 certificates are not applicable.

British Energy (Research Paper)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the BZW research paper, "The Cash Generator". [30454]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The BZW research paper on British Energy, "The Cash Generator" was produced by BZW Research, an affiliate of Barclays de Zoete Wedd Securities Ltd., as part of its internal research activity and was not produced on behalf of the Government. The Financial Services Act 1986 restricts the widespread distribution of this type of analysts' research. It is available to clients of BZW Research and other persons falling within FSA exemptions. Consequently, it is for BZW and its legal advisers to determine whether it would be appropriate for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Procedure Committee

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to bring forward proposals to implement the recommendations of the first report of the Procedure Committee of Session 1995–96, HC 386, regarding the taking of the oath and other related matters after an election; and if he will make a statement. [30983]

Mr. Newton: I am considering the Committee's report, to which I hope to respond shortly.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women, in her Department on 1 April. [30558]

Mr. Sproat: As at 1 April 1996 there were 181 men and 168 women employed by the Department of National Heritage. The following table lists the number of officials in the principal grades—grades 1 to 7—and the number of staff in administrative grades—SEO and below—showing the percentage of women in each case.

Grade	*Total number of staff*	*Total number of women*	*Percentage of staff that are women*
G1A	1	0	0
G3	4	1	25
G4	1	0	0
G5	16	4	25
G6	8	2	25
G7	48	15	31
SEO[1]	26	11	42
HEO(D)	4	2	50
HEO[1]	69	29	42
EO[1]	61	32	52
AO[1]	81	49	60
AA[1]	31	23	74

[1] Includes equivalent grades.

Listed Buildings (Exports)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the number of listed *(a)* non-conformist chapels, *(b)* other ecclesiastical buildings and *(c)* other structures which have been taken down exported and re-built in (i) Japan and (ii) other countries, since 1986. [30686]

Mr. Sproat: This information is not available.

Chipperfield Report

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the proposals made by the Chipperfield report on the Royal Fine Art Commission have been accepted; and when she intends to implement them. [31023]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's response has been placed in the Library with the Chipperfield report. Recommendations concerning the post of secretary have been implemented and the post of deputy secretary, finance, has been dropped as suggested in the report. My right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment expects to give advice to local planning authorities later in the year about consulting the RFAC on major developments. The standard term of appointment for commissioners has been reduced from seven years to five and new appointments made in 1994, 1995 and 1996 reflect the diversity recommended in the report. Various less specific recommendations have been taken into account in the working practices of the commission.

Millennium Commission

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the representation of each part of the United Kingdom in the membership of the Millennium Commission. [31244]

Mr. Sproat: Members of the Millennium Commission are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. They are not appointed to represent specific areas of the United Kingdom. The commissioners have a broad range of experience and travel widely before making any decisions concerning the allocation of national lottery funds.

Telifis na Gaeilge

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures are proposed in order that people in Northern Ireland will have access to Telifis na Gaeilge when it commences broadcasting; and if she will make a statement. [29974]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Telifis na Gaelige will be received by many residents in Northern Ireland who are already able to receive Radio Telifis Eireann broadcasts.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30062]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage is responsible for very few regulations and does not have a stand-alone deregulation unit as such. Three civil servants in the strategy and systems division at grades 5 , 7 and EO deal with deregulation matters as part of their remit to cover inter-departmental issues. Members of other divisions with specific areas of responsibility, particularly tourism, also handle deregulation as it affects their areas, liaising with the central staff as necessary. Thus it is not possible to identify a budgetary allocation as being dedicated to this activity.

None of the staff in the central unit has private sector experience, or has been seconded from business.

PRIME MINISTER

Kyle of Lochalsh

9. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to pay an official visit to the Kyle of Lochalsh. [29808]

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [30041]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [30043]

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 June. [29801]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Bosnia

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consult other Heads of Government about extending the implementation force involvement in former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [31154]

The Prime Minister: Under the terms of the Bosnia peace agreement, and the United Nations Security Council resolution 1031, IFOR's mandate expires in December. We expect implementation force IFOR to have successfully completed its military mission by that time. When IFOR leaves, we expect the leaders elected in the forthcoming Bosnian elections to take on responsibility for Bosnia's future. We remain in constant contact with other Governments on this and other Bosnia-related subjects.

Hong Kong (Beef Ban)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Prime Minister what consultations took place between Her Majesty's Government and the Governor of Hong Kong before the decision was taken by the Hong Kong authorities to ban the entry of British beef into the colony. [31118]

The Prime Minister: Hong Kong has autonomy in all trade matters. The Hong Kong Government's suspension of the import of British beef was imposed after the European Union's decision to prohibit the export of British beef. In announcing the suspension, the Hong Kong Government made clear that they had taken this decision to restore confidence in the beef market in Hong Kong, and that they did not consider it necessary to restrict the import of British beef on health grounds.

Conservative Party (Donations)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make representations to the chairman of the Conservative party about the conclusions of the Touche Ross report to the Conservative party of July 1993 in respect of donations to that party of fraudulently obtained money. [31262]

The Prime Minister: This does not fall within my responsibilities as Prime Minister.

Dr. Trifkovic and Mr. Zametica

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings his Ministers have had with *(a)* Dr. Svdja Trifkovic and *(b)* Jovan Zametica; and what was discussed. [31144]

The Prime Minister: None. Mr. Zametica was present when Rajko Kasagic, former Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, called on my right hon. and learned Friend, the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development during a visit to London on 29 April.

Northern Ireland (Talks)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the advantages for the success of the all-party talks of Sinn Fein taking part in them. [31153]

The Prime Minister: The talks will hold out the best prospects for a settlement if they are as inclusive as possible, but only on condition that all those participating are committed to exclusively peaceful methods. We and the Irish Government have expressed the hope that all parties with an electoral mandate will take part in the talks, including Sinn Fein; but we have agreed that they must be limited to parties establishing their commitment to peaceful methods, and that participation by Sinn Fein requires unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994.

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names and occupations of the current members of and the terms of reference of *(a)* the Review Body on Senior Salaries, *(b)* the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, *(c)* the Review on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration, *(d)* the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay and *(e)* the School Teachers' Review Body. [30316]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 15 May, *Official Report*, column *457*, and to the terms of reference contained in the 1996 reports of the review bodies, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Personal details such as occupations, when published, may be obtained from the standard works of reference.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Crown Court Trials

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Crown court trials there were in the west midlands in each year since 1990. [30652]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 4 June 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of Crown Court trials held in the West Midlands since 1990.

The figures are as follows:

Year	*Birmingham*	*Coventry*	*Wolverhampton*
1990	569	142	309
1991	618	100	336
1992	509	137	333
1993	534	174	279
1994	495	246	327
1995	600	149	407

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average cost of a Crown court trial in 1995. [30653]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department incurs three main costs during Crown court trials; staff and accommodation costs to the Court Service, judicial salaries and the cost to the legal aid fund. No average cost per trial is available as cost data for the Crown court are collected on the basis of the cost per day. For the year 1995–96 these amounted to approximately £5,245 per day. This figure does not cover the cost of any of the other agencies involved in the trial process.

Mortgage Possession Actions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many mortgage possession actions were entered and orders made for the possession of property in each county court in England and Wales in each year since 1991. [30706]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated May 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about mortgage possession actions and orders.

I enclose a table which details the number of mortgage possession actions entered and orders for possession made in each county court in England and Wales since 1991. As the table is too long to be printed in the Official Report, arrangements will be made for a copy to be deposited in the Library of the House.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total. [30764]

Mr. Streeter: For the Lord Chancellor's Department headquarters and associated offices, the Court Service and the Public Trust Office, the information is as follows.

	Number	*Percentage*
Able-bodied	9,796	82.82
Registered disabled	185	1.57
Self-classified disabled	227	1.92
Not known	1,620	13.69

Company Debts

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in how many cases legal aid has been allowed for company debts because these debts have subsequently been ascribed to an individual. [30809]

Mr. Streeter: Cases where legal aid is granted following an assignment from a company are not separately recorded. The Civil Legal Aid (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1996, which came into force on 1 June, permit an application to be refused where a cause of action is transferred to another party with a view to allowing the action to be commenced or continued with the benefit of a legal aid certificate.

Legal Aid

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance he gives to the Legal Aid Board to help it to distinguish between genuine and bogus applicants; and what action is taken against those assessed to be abusing the legal aid system. [31025]

Mr. Streeter: Section 5(6) of the Legal Aid Act 1988 precludes the Lord Chancellor from giving guidance to the Legal Aid Board in relation to the consideration or disposal of applications for legal aid in particular cases. Applicants suspected of intentionally failing to comply with the regulations or of knowingly making any false statement or false representation are liable to prosecution under section 39 of the Legal Aid Act 1988.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the current number of children aged over 16 and under 19 years for whom child benefit *(a)* is and *(b)* is not payable who are taking (i) non-advanced courses and (ii) advanced courses, broken down as far as possible by the type of course. [30241]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested.

Data are not available on the nature of the education being undertaken by children for whom child benefit is in payment. However, child benefit is payable beyond age 16 only where the child is undergoing full-time non-advanced education. Benefit is not payable for children undergoing advanced education, defined as courses above A-level or equivalent.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the annual administrative cost of the compensation recovery unit in each year since it was established. [30390]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 22 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, asking what was the administrative cost of the Compensation Recovery Unit in each year since it was established.

The information is provided in the table below.

Period	*Operating costs (£ million)*
1 August 1989–31 March 1990	0.13
1 April 1990–31 March 1991	1.7
1 April 1991–31 March 1992	1.9
1 April 1992–31 March 1993	2.1
1 April 1993–31 March 1994	2.7
1 April 1994–31 March 1995	2.8
1 April 1995–31 March 1996	3.1

Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

University of Loughborough

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations his Department has *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the university of Loughborough in the last year on matters relating to potential research into child support issues. [30684]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The centre for research in social policy at the university of Loughborough has been commissioned to evaluate a Benefits Agency/Employment Service scheme for lone parents which touches on child support matters.

CRSP was also invited to tender for research into the departures pilot scheme but was unsuccessful.

A possible survey of absent parents was under negotiation with CRSP, but further commissioning work has been postponed until after the departures scheme has been introduced and has had time to deal with a significant number of cases.

Motability Finance Ltd.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will maintain his policy that the banks currently involved in Motability Finance Ltd. are not granted sole lessor status. [29926]

Mr. Burt: The Department regards competition as a healthy measure in ensuring value for money. Competition must, however, bring long-term benefits to Motability's disabled customers.

End-of-year Returns

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *370–71*, when he expects to publish the end-of-year returns for 1995–96. [30730]

Mr. Heald: Information will be available from May 1997.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to implement the recommendations contained in the report on the review of the prescription for chronic bronchitis and emphysema in underground coal workers, prescribed disease D12, by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. [31029]

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to respond to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council report, "Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema," Cm. 3240. [31242]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 21 May, *Official Report*, column *185*.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *27*, on expenditure on goods and services, when the figures for 1995–96 will be available. [31237]

Mr. Burt: The figures for the Department's expenditure on goods and services in 1995–96 will be available in July 1996.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *28*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31232]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to ensure that the guidance sent to Benefits Agency staff members formerly published by HMSO will be available to organisations and members of the public. [31074]

Mr. Roger Evans: Guidance sent to Benefits Agency staff members formerly published by HMSO can still be obtained from that source.

Discussions are in progress between the Benefits Agency and HMSO to determine appropriate arrangements for the future.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people *(a)* had social security benefits withdrawn and *(b)* were ruled ineligible for such benefits due to the changes in social security regulations for asylum seekers, in March and April. [31182]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. In March, the Benefits Agency was notified by the Home Office of 702 negative decisions on asylum status involving social security benefit claims. In April, 810 notifications were received.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Data Protection Registrar concerning registration of personal data held by the Security Service which are not subject to section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984. [29699]

Mr. Howard: I have had no such discussions with the Data Protection Registrar. The Security Service has confirmed to the Data Protection Registrar, however, that exemption of personal data held by the service from the registration provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security as provided for by section 27 of the Act.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of people who were electronically tagged in England and Wales in 1995; and what was the total cost involved. [29998]

Mr. Sackville: Eighteen offenders were sentenced to electronically monitored curfew orders in 1995 as part of the trials being conducted in Manchester, Reading and Norfolk. A further 47 offenders have been similarly sentenced so far in 1996. As explained to the hon. Member on 26 October 1995, *Official Report,* column *761,* the total cost of the first nine months of the trials to April 1996, including non-recurring start-up costs such as research and development, training, capital and equipment, was £1.6 million. The results of the trials are being evaluated by the Home Office research and statistics directorate.

Maidstone Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parole applications were turned down on the basis that rehabilitation courses had not been completed at Her Majesty's prison Maidstone per month since April 1993. [30211]

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many secure centres for juvenile offenders have been built since 1986; and if he will list their locations in England and Wales. [30203]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about secure centres for juveniles which have been built since 1986.

Four local authority secure units have been built since 1986. They are Sutton Place Safe Centre in Hull; St. John's Community Home School, Erdington, Birmingham; St. John's Centre, Tiffield, Northampton; and Vinney Green Secure Unit, Mangotsfield, Bristol.

Temporary Releases

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many temporary release failures there have been in each month since 1 December 1995. [30680]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how many temporary release failures there have been in each month since 1 December 1995.

The requested information is as follows:

December 1995: 48

January 1996: 45

February 1996: 43

March 1996: 40

April 1996: 29

To 18 May 1996: 17

Prison Population

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of prisoners likely to be held in United Kingdom prisons in October. [30473]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what is his estimate of the number of prisoners likely to be held in United Kingdom prisons in October.

The latest projection produced in April is that the prison population in England and Wales could be around 56,700 on 31 October 1996. The population was projected from current trends but past experience has shown the likelihood of departures from the trend. Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from the Secretaries of State for those Departments.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of people seeking

political asylum and being held in custody as of 14 May, the length of time each person has been held in detention and their nationality. [30512]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is for those held in detention as at 30 April and is given in the tables.

Table 1: Number of people recorded as detained on 30 April 1996[1] who had sought asylum at some stage, by length of detention

Length	*Total number detained*
0–1 Month[1]	181
1–2 Months	143
2-6 Months	280
6–12 Months	106
12 Months+	15
Total	725

[1] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as detained on 30 April 1996[1] who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality

Nationality	*Total number detained*
Nigeria	114
India	93
Algeria	67
Gambia	44
Ghana	38
Sri Lanka	37
Turkey	33
Zaire	32
Pakistan	23
Bangladesh	22
China Peoples Republic of	22
Romania	21
Czechoslovakia	12
Angola	11
Lithuania	8
Afghanistan	7
Albania	7
Iran	7
Kenya	7
Ivory Coast	6
Niger	6
Poland	6
Russia	6
Somalia	6
Tanzania	6
Ecuador	5
Sierra Leone	5
Colombia	4
Cyprus	4
Jamaica	4
Yugoslavia	4
Bulgaria	3
Ethiopia	3
Lebanon	3
Liberia	3
Peru	3
Uganda	3
South Africa	3
Cameroon	2
Georgia	2
Iraq	2
Montenegro	2
Palestine	2
Sudan	2
Togo	2
Zimbabwe	2
Nationality doubtful	6
Others	15
Total	725

[1] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the protest by asylum seekers in Rochester prison on 17 May. [31197]

Miss Widdecombe: At approximately 20:30 hours on 16 May, 69 overseas nationals detained at Rochester refused to return to their cells at the end of the normal association period. The reason for the protest is not known at this time and is currently subject to an internal Prison Service investigation. However, it is thought that it may be linked to possible reductions in association time.

The protest was passive, but the detainees refused to participate in negotiations with staff. At 01:00 hours on 17 May, a direct order was given to the detainees to return to their cells, but they refused to comply. Prison Service control and restraint teams were deployed to clear the wing. Some detainees offered passive resistance by rolling themselves into a ball. The wing was cleared by 01:30 hours with no serious injuries to staff or detainees.

Following clearance of the wing, 10 detainees barricaded themselves into a cell, but this was quickly overcome with no resistance.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30545]

Mr. Howard: Figures for the number of male and female permanent non-industrial staff and the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and percentages of women employed at those grades in the main Home Office on 1 April were as follows. A breakdown by administrative grades is not available for that date; figures shown refer to the staffing position on 24 May. Figures for the Prison Service are as from 1 April.

Area	(a) Male (i) Full-time	(ii) Part-time	Total	(b) Female (i) Full-time	(ii) Part-time	Total
Home Office main (includes immigration and nationality directorate)	4,515	37	4,552	3,627	668	4,295
United Kingdom passport agency	539	36	575	815	217	1,032
Forensic science service	362	3	365	311	121	432
Fire service college	65	0	65	60	7	67
Prison service	29,369	307	29,676	6,582	1,083	7,665
Total	34,850	383	35,233	11,395	2,096	13,491

Home Office staff by grade equivalents

Grade level equivalents	(a) Male	(b) Female	Total	Percentage female
Grade 1	1	0	1	00
Grade 2	6	0	6	00
Grade 3	20	5	25	20
Grade 4	8	0	8	00
Grade 5	57	12	69	17.39
Grade 6	75	8	83	09.64
Grade 7	337	123	460	26.74
Senior executive officer	458	157	615	25.53
Higher executive officer	980	555	1,535	36.16
Executive officer	2,094	1,743	3,837	45.43
Administrative officer	824	1,830	2,654	68.95
Administrative assistant	685	1,393	2,078	67.03
Total[1]	5,556	5,826	11,382	51.19

[1]Includes 11 full-time male employees with obsolete grades or non-mandate grades.

Home Office administrative staff (excluding grade equivalents)

Grade	(a) Male	(b) Female	Total	Percentage female
Grade 1	1	0	1	00
Grade 2	6	0	6	00
Grade 3	12	6	18	33.33
Grade 4	2	0	2	00
Grade 5	57	13	70	18.57
Grade 6	62	7	69	10.14
Grade 7	267	131	398	32.91
Senior executive officer	194	102	296	34.46
Higher executive officer	482	391	873	44.78
Executive officer	662	836	1,498	55.81
Administrative officer	779	1,594	2,373	67.17
Administrative assistant	786	1,567	2,353	66.59
Total	3,310	4,647	7,957	58.40

Prison service staff: administrative staff shown by grade equivalent.
Prison officer grades shown separately

Grade level equivalents	(a) male	(b) female	Total	Percentage female
Grade 1	0	0	0	0
Grade 2	1	0	1	0
Grade 3	8	0	8	0
Grade 4	9	2	11	18.18
Grade 5	52	10	62	16.12
Grade 6	117	16	133	12.03
Grade 7	243	24	267	8.98
Senior executive officer	448	111	559	19.85
Higher executive officer	366	231	597	38.69
Executive officer	1,471	1,051	2,522	41.67
Administrative officer	560	1,932	2,492	77.52
Administrative assistant	1,681	1,350	3,031	44.53
Total	4,956	4,727	9,683	48.81
Prison grades				
Governor 1[1]	48	2	50	4.00
Governor 2[1]	69	7	76	9.21
Governor 3[1]	119	16	135	11.85
Governor 4[1]	297	42	339	12.39
Governor 5[1]	411	28	439	6.37

Prison service staff: administrative staff shown by grade equivalent.
Prison officer grades shown separately

Grade level equivalents	(a) male	(b) female	Total	Percentage female
Governor 5 (accelerated promotion scheme)[1]	35	23	58	39.65
Principal officer[1]	1,261	41	1,302	3.14
Principal officer (accelerated promotion scheme)[1]	11	8	19	42.10
Senior officer[1]	3,365	183	3,548	5.16
Prison officer[1]	17,564	2,165	19,729	10.97
Prison auxiliary[1]	1,540	423	1,963	21.55
Total[1]	24,720	2,938	27,658	10.62
Grand total	29,676	7,665	37,341	20.52

[1] Specific prison service grades. Grades 1–5 were abolished on 1 April 1996 on the establishment of the senior civil service. The relevant figures in the above tables refer to the grades to which the staff concerned previously belonged.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary for the Home Department (1) how many people were detained in Birmingham prison, under Immigration Act powers in *(a)* March and *(b)* April; and what were the nationalities of those detained; [31183]

(2) how many of those people detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers were deported during the months of March and April. [31184]

Miss Widdecombe: At the end of March, 63 prisoners in Birmingham prison were recorded as being held under Immigration Act powers. At the end of April, 48 prisoners were held; a breakdown by nationality is given in the table. Provisional information shows that 37 persons were discharged and deported from Birmingham prison during March and April.

Population of Immigration Act detainees[1] in HM prison Birmingham on 30 April 1996; by nationality

Nationality	Number
Algeria	8
Bangladesh	2
India	27
Nigeria	2
Pakistan	2
South Africa	2
Others	5
Total	48

[1] Provisional figures.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum were deported from Birmingham prison in January, February, March and April. [31186]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of asylum detainees at Her Majesty's prison Birmingham who were deported, by month.

Month	*[1]Number deported*
January	4
February	2
March	1
April	1

[1]Left by means of a deportation order, enforced or supervised departure.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum were detained in Birmingham prison during April; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [31293]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table.

Population of asylum detainees at HM Prison Birmingham on 30 April by nationality.

Nationality	*Number*
Algerian	7
Indian	15
Pakistani	2
Others	4
Total	28

Prison Building Programme

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons are currently being built in England and Wales; and where each prison will be sited. [30533]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of new prisons being built in England and Wales and where each will be sited.

The Home Secretary announced in September 1993 that six new prisons would be built, using private sector finance. Lowdham Grange was added to the programme in March 1996.

The first three privately-funded prisons will open in 1997–98 at Bridgend in south Wales; Fazakerley in Merseyside; and Lowdham Grange in Nottinghamshire. Planning permission for further prisons is currently being pursued in Manchester.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the date for which the Criminal Cases Review Commission will receive applications. [30586]

Mr. Kirkhope: Members are currently being recruited for the commission and we expect them to be appointed during September. The commission will begin taking cases after a short transition period; the precise date will be announced nearer the time.

Metropolitan Police (Civil Damages Awards)

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil damages awards have been made against, and what was the total cost of such awards to, the Metropolitan police in each of the past five years; and if he will list the details by police division. [30672]

Mr. Maclean: Information on court awards is not held on a divisional basis. The following is the other information requested:

Court awards

Year	*Number*	*Total cost £000s*
1991	9	21
1992	11	203
1993	6	53
1994	11	84
1995	22	267

Private Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the privately run prisons in England and Wales. [30536]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about privately-run prisons in England and Wales.

There are at present four contractually-managed prisons. They are: the Wolds prison, which is managed by Group 4; Blakenhurst prison, which is managed by United Kingdom Detention Services; Doncaster prison, which is managed by Premier Prison Services; and Buckley Hall prison which is managed by Group 4.

Ex-prisoners (Rehabilitation)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what services he operates to enable prisoners, when released, to be rehabilitated into society, with special reference to arrangements for both long-term and short-term prisoners to find accommodation once their prison sentence has ended. [30663]

Mr. Sackville: Depending on their circumstances, accommodation is available to ex-prisoners in approved probation/bail hostels or in housing supported by area probation services. There are 2,349 places in approved probation/bail hostels and over 5,500 housing places supported by probation services.

The general arrangements for the post-release supervision of offenders are set out in chapter 7 of "National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community 1995" and the "National Framework for

the Throughcare of Offenders in Custody to the Completion of Supervision in the Community", copies of which are in the Library.

Prison Education

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners received education and for how much time each week in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1995 in (i) Wales and (ii) the regions of England. [30708]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Win Griffiths, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the percentage of prisoners who received education and for how much time each week in (a) 1979 and (b) 1995 in (i) Wales and (ii) the regions of England.

This information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Prisoners receiving education and training may attend for only a short time, it is therefore difficult to provide information on numbers of students and easier to provide information on student hours.

In 1979, when the average daily prison population was 42,220, 4.6 million student hours were spent on education and training classes by inmates. In 1995, when the average daily population (excluding those held in police cells) was 50,962, 9.4 million student hours were spent on education and training classes.
All prisoners are appraised for education and their attendance is decided as part of local sentence planning. The governor will then order the appropriate amount of education to cover the planned needs of the population within the constraints of his budget.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30767]

Mr. Howard: The total number of registered disabled staff in the Home Office and its agencies, and the percentage this represents of the total number of staff, are as shown. Figures refer to the staffing position on 23 May.

Number of registered disabled staff: 229

Percentage of registered disabled staff: 0.4

The nature of many of the posts within the Prison Service limits the scope for employing people with disabilities. Excluding Prison Service staff, the total number of registered disabled staff in the Home Office and its agencies, and the percentage this represented of the total number of staff on 23 May were as follows:

Number of registered disabled staff: 174

Percentage of registered disabled staff: 1.5

Note: The total number of staff in the Home Office and its agencies, including the Prison Service, was 51,782 on 23 May. Excluding the Prison Service the total was 11,322.

Homeless People (Electoral Registration)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue new guidelines to electoral registration officers as to the inclusion of homeless people on the electoral register following the decision in the case of Kevin Lippiatt *v.* the Electoral Registration Officer, Penrith district council. [31212]

Mr. Sackville: We aim to issue guidance in time for this year's electoral registration canvass.

Prison Service (Private Sector Involvement)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to encourage greater private sector involvement in the Prison Service. [31062]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about private sector involvement in the Prison Service.

Over the past five years the Prison Service has successfully involved the private sector in initiatives to improve the services it provides and to achieve greater value for money. Currently, four prisons (Wolds, Blakenhurst, Doncaster and Buckley Hall) are managed by the private sector, and seven out of the eight prison escort areas have now been contracted-out. There has been substantial private-sector involvement to provide purposeful work and training for prisoners. Functions such as prison education have been contracted-out where it has been determined that this leads to greater efficiency and economy.

The Home Secretary announced in September 1993 that six new prisons would be built, using private sector finance, and Lowdham Grange was added to the programme in March 1995. The first three privately-funded prisons will open in 1997–8 at Bridgend in south Wales, Fazakerley in Merseyside, and Lowdham Grange in Nottinghamshire. Planning permission for further prisons is currently being sought in Manchester and Telford.

Prison Sanitation

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners had 24 hour access to sanitation on *(a)* 12 April, *(b)* 12 May and *(c)* currently. [31064]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 4 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the percentage of prisoners who had 24 hour access to sanitation on (a) 12 April, (b) 12 May and (c) currently.

The Prison Service achieved its performance target of ensuring that all prisoners had access to sanitation at all times on 12 April 1996 and full access has been maintained since then. This has been achieved despite a record rise in the prison population and despite the Service's need to reduce costs.

Deportations

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of people deported under Immigration Act powers from the United Kingdom for March and April. [31185]

Mr. Kirkhope: The number of persons removed under the deportation process, including voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated, was 146 in March 1996. In addition, 231 illegal entrants were removed or departed voluntarily. Complete data for April are not yet available.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dogs have been destroyed as a result of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; [31078]

(2) how many dogs are currently in police kennels awaiting the implementation of destruction orders; what is the average period of detention; and what is the longest current period of detention for a dog. [31077]

Mr. Sackville: Some 770 destruction orders were made between 1992 and 1994, although some of these orders will have been the subject of appeals. Figures for 1995 are likely to be available in the autumn.

There are currently 13 dogs held in police kennels in England and Wales awaiting the implementation of a destruction order under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. The average period of detention for these dogs is two years and four months, and the longest period of detention for a dog is currently four years and five months.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; and what proposals he has to amend the legislation. [31076]

Mr. Sackville: The Department has received representations from various individuals and organisations which also submitted views to the recent House of Lords Select Committee on the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill [Lords]. Details are contained in its report, published on 26 February, HL paper No.48. The Government were unable to accept the recommendation contained in the report that the Act should be amended.

Representations have also been made to the Home Affairs Committee which is currently inquiring into the operation of the Act. While the Government will, of course, consider carefully any recommendations which the Committee may make, there are currently no plans to amend the Act.

Wild Animals and Birds

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he gives to organisations which provide sanctuary, treatment and rehabilitation in the wild for wild animals and birds; and if he will make a statement. [30793]

Mr. Sackville: I am not aware of any grant aid to any such organisations in recent years.

Tinsley House Immigration Detention Centre

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the capital cost of Tinsley house immigration detention centre; and what are the terms of repayment under the private finance initiative; [31210]

(2) what are the terms of the contract concluded by Wackenhut for the operation of Tinsley house immigration detention centre. [31213]

Mr. Kirkhope: Tinsley house was not fully funded through the private finance initiative; the cost of the building works was borne by the private sector but the running of the facility is the subject of a separate contract. It would not be right to divulge the capital cost of the building, or the terms of the operating contract, as this information is commercially sensitive.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the annual savings from the operation of the contract by Wackenhut at Tinsley house immigration detention centre. [31211]

Mr. Kirkhope: Tinsley house is a new facility providing 150 additional detention places. The extra places will enable us to reduce the use of more expensive, less suitable, alternative accommodation and to effect the removal of more people with no entitlement to remain in this country. It is not possible to quantify the overall resultant savings to the public purse but I am satisfied that the contract with Wackenhut to run Tinsley house provides very good value for money.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Trade Unions

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives of the civil service trade unions; and what subjects were discussed. [29928]

Mr. Freeman: I last met representatives of the civil service unions on 29 January where many issues relating to the civil service were discussed.

Council of Europe (Meetings)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of the Office of Public Service; and if he will make a statement. [29366]

Mr. Freeman: There have been 212 meetings of or organised by the Council of Europe since January 1995 attended by members of staff of the United Kingdom delegation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. No Ministers or officials in the Office of Public Service have attended these meetings.

Government Car Service

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will list the make, age and purchase price of each vehicle in the Government car service ministerial fleet; [30387]

(2) what was the total cost of maintaining and operating the Government car service ministerial fleet, for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96. [30386]

Mr. Freeman: As these are purely operational matters I have asked the chief executive of the Security Facilities Executive to write directly to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. C. King to Ms Glenda Jackson, dated 30 May 1996:

I have been asked by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reply direct to your two Parliamentary Questions relating to the Government Car Service (GCS). As Chief Executive of the Security Facilities Executive Agency, I have operational responsibility for the GCS.

The Government Car Service currently purchases motor vehicles from the Ford, Jaguar, Rover and Vauxhall motor companies. I regret that, for security and commercial reasons, details of individual vehicles cannot be made public.

The estimated costs of maintaining and operating the Government Car Service for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96 are as follows:

1992/93: £7.0 million

1993/94: £7.3 million

1994/95: £7.6 million

1995/96: £7.4 million

These costs cover the whole of the Government Car Service, including the Ministerial vehicles.

Civil Service College (Devolution Course)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a copy of the now withdrawn Civil Service College leaflet advertising courses on devolution this summer; and if he will make a statement. [30693]

Mr. Freeman: The promotion and scheduling of courses and seminars at the Civil Service College is an operational matter. I have asked the chief executive of the Civil Service College to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from S. H. F. Hickey to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 28 May 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply to your Question on the Civil Service College's proposed seminar on devolution.

I am arranging for a copy of the full information pack on College seminars and programmes for the Senior Civil Service to be made available for the Library. It includes a proposed single half-day briefing seminar on the work of the non-party Constitution Unit. In order to avoid any risk of misinterpretation, this seminar has been postponed.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) for what reasons HMSO has ceased publication of the social fund guide; [31061]

(2) if he will list the publications which HMSO has ceased to publish in the last year; for what reasons HMSO has ceased publishing these documents; and what steps will be taken to ensure that copies of these remain available to the public. [31060]

Mr. Freeman: As these questions concern purely operational matters, I have asked the chief executive of HMSO to write direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Lynn to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 29 May 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your two Parliamentary Questions (numbers 183 and 185) to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Social Fund Guide is a loose-leaf publication in two volumes, which was last published in May 1995. Amendments are published from time to time, and there have been five so far for the current edition. Both the main volumes and the amendments are prepared and printed by Benefits Agency Publishing Ltd, who provide copies for internal use within the Benefits Agency, and sell copies to HMSO for resale to customers. Amendments numbers 4 and 5 were printed some months ago, but there was a delay in taking copies for resale because of on-going discussions about alternative publishing methods, such as on-demand printing. I have now asked my people to take these amendments into stock immediately so that continuity of service can be provided to purchasers.

You also ask what publications HMSO has ceased to publish in the last year. The Government departments who commission the vast majority of our non-parliamentary publishing output are free to use other publishers (or to publish in-house) if they choose. The only regular publication that we are aware of ceasing to publish during the last year is *The Commonwealth Yearbook*, which is now published by Hanson Cooke.

Performance Bands

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official*

Report, column *16*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31233]

Mr. Willetts: The Office of Public Service and its agencies, HMSO and the Central Office of Information have obtained six performance bonds and six parent company guarantees in the last five years. No unconditional on-demand bonds, advance payment bonds and retention bonds were required by the Department in the last five years.

China

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he had on human rights issues with those Chinese leaders whom he met during his recent visit to China; which political opponents of the Government he met; and if he will make a statement. [31156]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The two main objectives for my visit to China were to develop commercial opportunities for British business in China and to take forward co-operation over Hong Kong. During my visit, I focused on these two objectives, which were achieved. I did not raise human rights issues. The Chinese are in no doubt about our long-held and serious concerns in that area.

Hong Kong

Mr. Byers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to meet *(a)* Mr. Li Ka Shing, *(b)* Mr. David Choy, *(c)* Mr. Rong Yiren, *(d)* Mr. Stanley Ho, *(e)* Mr. T. T. Tsui and *(f)* Mr. C. H. Tung during his forthcoming visit to Hong Kong. [30598]

The Deputy Prime Minister: During my visit to Hong Kong on 24 to 25 May, I met a broad range of businessmen, politicians and general opinion-formers.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel, Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the payment per week currently made to the three British service personnel who have been convicted and sentenced for the manslaughter of a Danish tour guide in Cyprus. [30199]

Mr. Soames: No payments have been made by my Department to the three men since they were discharged from the Army on 22 April. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has now assumed welfare responsibility for these individuals.

Wessex Helicopter (Royal Family)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the replacement of the Wessex helicopter used by the royal family. [30242]

Mr. Arbuthnot : The Wessex HCC4s used to provide the VVIP helicopter service for the royal family and senior Government Ministers have been in service since 1969 and are becoming more difficult and costly to maintain. We are examining options for a replacement service but no decisions have yet been taken.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30552]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The number and percentages of male and female staff employed by the Ministry of Defence and its agencies are detailed in the following table.

Ministry of Defence permanent UK based civilian staff at 1 April 1996

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups—1 April 1996	*Male*	*Per cent.*	*Female*	*Per cent.*	*Total*
Former Grade 1 (including 1A)	3	100.0	0	0.0	3
Former Grade 2 (including UIPP (Higher))	8	100.0	0	0.0	8
Former Grade 3 (including UIPP (Lower))	43	95.6	2	4.4	45
Former Grade 4	24	96.0	1	4.0	25
Former Grade 5	240	93.4	17	6.6	257
Former Grade 6	708	97.4	19	2.6	727
Former Grade 7	2,598	94.5	151	5.5	2,749
Senior Executive Officer	1,119	82.2	242	17.8	1,361
Administration Fast Stream (HEO(D))	10	55.6	8	44.4	18
Administration Fast Stream (AT/HEO(D))	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Higher Executive Officer	2,046	66.1	1,047	33.9	3,093
Administration Fast Stream (AT)	8	88.9	1	11.1	9
Executive Officer	2,888	48.9	3,019	51.1	5,907
Administrative Officer	3,846	27.7	10,017	72.3	13,863
Administrative Assistant	1,363	21.6	4,954	78.4	6,317
Senior Economic Assistant	1	100.0	0	0.0	1
Senior Assistant Statistician	0	0.0	1	100.0	1
Assistant Statistician	5	71.4	2	28.6	7
Senior Information Officer	30	75.0	10	25.0	40
Information Officer	39	69.6	17	30.4	56
Assistant Information Officer	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Senior Librarian	9	50.0	9	50.0	18

Ministry of Defence permanent UK based civilian staff at 1 April 1996

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups—1 April 1996	*Male*	*Per cent.*	*Female*	*Per cent.*	*Total*
Librarian	19	40.4	28	59.6	47
Assistant Librarian	11	22.4	38	77.6	49
Museum Curatorial Group Grade D	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Museum Curatorial Group Grade E	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Museum Curatorial Group Grade F	5	62.5	3	37.5	8
Museum Curatorial Group Grade G	1	16.7	5	83.3	6
Museum Conservation Group Grade F	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Senior Mapping and Charting Officer	88	77.9	25	22.1	113
Higher Mapping and Charting Officer	200	82.6	42	17.4	242
Mapping and Charting Officer	364	70.8	150	29.2	514
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 1	98	59.0	68	41.0	166
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 2	23	41.8	32	58.2	55
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	2,270	99.0	23	1.0	2,293
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	3,641	98.5	54	1.5	3,695
Professional and Technology Officer	4,213	98.0	88	2.0	4,301
Professional and Technology Officer IV (obs)	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Technical Grade 1	277	73.9	98	26.1	375
Technical Grade 2	11	42.3	15	57.7	26
Graduate Trainee	104	91.2	10	8.8	114
Trainee Incorporated Engineer	12	85.7	2	14.3	14
Senior Graphics Officer	10	90.9	1	9.1	11
Higher Graphics Officer	45	95.7	2	4.3	47
Graphics Technical Grade	1	100.0	0	0.0	1
Graphics Officer	161	83.0	33	17.0	194
Senior Research Officer (R)	44	86.3	7	13.7	51
Research Officer (R)	10	83.3	2	16.7	12
Chief Typing Manager	0	0.0	10	100.0	10
Typing Manager	0	0.0	117	100.0	117
Senior Personal Secretary	0	0.0	88	100.0	88
Personal Secretary	3	0.4	784	99.6	787
Typist	6	0.2	2,895	99.8	2,901
Trainee Typist	0	0.0	1	100.0	1
Senior Scientific Officer	1,373	89.3	164	10.7	1,537
Higher Scientific Officer	1,177	84.0	224	16.0	1,401
Scientific Officer	829	78.7	224	21.3	1,053
Assistant Scientific Officer	162	69.8	70	30.2	232
Senior Instructional Officer	65	100.0	0	0.0	65
Higher Instructional Officer	351	98.6	5	1.4	356
Instructional Officer I	1,132	99.0	11	1.0	1,143
Instructional Officer II	134	96.4	5	3.6	139
Catering Manager 3	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Chef 1/Chief Cook 1	16	94.1	1	5.9	17
Chef 2/Chief Cook 2	18	85.7	3	14.3	21
Museum Technical Grade 2	3	100.0	0	0.0	3
Museum Technician Grade 3	1	50.0	1	50.0	2
Museum Support Grade 1	1	100.0	0	0.0	1
Museum Support Grade 2	2	100.0	0	0.0	2
Museum Support Grade 3	21	100.0	0	0.0	21
Museum Support Grade 4	3	100.0	0	0.0	3
Museum Support Grade 5	6	100.0	0	0.0	6
Senior Photographic Officer	6	100.0	0	0.0	6
Higher photographic Officer	34	97.1	1	2.9	35
Photographic Officer	124	92.5	10	7.5	134
Process & General Supervisory Group Grade A	10	100.0	0	0.0	10
Process & General Supervisory Group Grade B	33	100.0	0	0.0	33
Process & General Supervisory Group Grade C	115	100.0	0	0.0	115
Process & General Supervisory Group Grade D	301	94.7	17	5.3	318
Process & General Supervisory Group Grade E	127	94.1	8	5.9	135
Senior Psychologist	9	40.9	13	59.1	22
Higher Psychologist	2	25.0	6	75.0	8
Psychologist (Graduate Trainee)	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
Stores Officer Grade A	13	100.0	0	0.0	13
Stores Officer Grade B	124	99.2	1	0.8	125
Stores Officer Grade C	309	96.9	10	3.1	319
Stores Officer Grade D	590	91.9	52	8.1	642
Support Manager 1	3	60.0	2	40.0	5
Support Manager 2	16	47.1	18	52.9	34
Support Manager 3	60	38.5	96	61.5	156

Ministry of Defence permanent UK based civilian staff at 1 April 1996

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups—1 April 1996	*Male*	*Per cent.*	*Female*	*Per cent.*	*Total*
Support Grade Band 1	259	27.8	674	72.2	933
Support Grade Band 2	407	48.9	426	51.1	833
Senior Telecommunications Technical Officer	41	100.0	0	0.0	41
Higher Telecommunications Technical Officer	105	100.0	0	0.0	105
Telecommunications Technical Officer	271	99.3	2	0.7	273
Assistant Telecommunications Technical Officer	356	95.7	16	4.3	372
Trainee Telecommunications Technical Officer	27	93.1	2	6.9	29
Communications Officer I	18	94.7	1	5.3	19
Communications Officer II	37	80.4	9	19.6	46
Communications Officer III	75	74.3	26	25.7	101
Communications Officer IV	217	69.8	94	30.2	311
Total staff in Open Structure and Occupational Groups	35,612	57.5	26,335	42.5	61,947
Total staff in Departmental non-industrial grades (1)	14,553	88.5	1,897	11.5	16,450
Industrial staff	27,355	82.3	5,877	17.7	32,232
Total non-industrial and industrial staff	77,520	69.4	34,109	30.6	111,629

Source:
DASA (Civilian and tri-service).
Notes:
(1) Departmental grades refer to those grades which are specific to the MoD.

British Forces Overseas

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which British military forces are based; and what is the number of service personnel at each such base. [30513]

Mr. Soames: The deployment of United Kingdom forces at April 1996 is shown in figure 3 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The number of UK service personnel at permanent overseas stations is as follows:

	Number
Ascension Islands	156
Brunei	948
Cyprus	3,874
Diego Garcia	40
Falkland Islands[1]	
Germany	23,500
Gibraltar	587
Hong Kong	1,920

[1] It is not our practice to publish the size of the Falklands garrison.

In addition some 10,500 service personnel are serving in the former Yugoslavia.

Defence Sales Office

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the net Government funding given to the Defence sales office for each of the last five years. [30591]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The net cost of the Defence Export Services Organisation for the last five years was as follows:

1991–92: £11.05 million
1992–93: £11.89 million
1993–94: £16.02 million
1994–95: £10.94 million
1995–96: £17.08 million

Army Technical Support Agency

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the planned collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency. [31476]

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to those hon. Members, local authorities, other organisations and individuals who have responded to the consultative document issued on 8 December 1995.

Our objective remains to bring together more of the staff of the agency, currently dispersed over six principal sites. This will enable them to make better use of new logistic systems and processes in support of customers in the Army and the other two services.

Our analysis of the options for the site of a collocated ATSA takes into account a number of considerations. The site must provide best value for money in terms of the balance between transition costs and longer-terms savings; it must provide good business benefits, including ease of communication with ATSA's principal customers, located at Andover; it must be a reasonable location for the staff of the agency, taking into account the fact that a large number will have to relocate whatever the choice of site; and it must also take account of regional and other economic factors.

These complex and potentially conflicting issues have been fully reflected in the responses to the consultative document. The additional information which has been provided has been taken into account in an independent analysis of the investment appraisal by my Department's senior economic adviser. Reassessment of some of the factors has shown that formal consideration needs to be given to Andover and Ludgershall as potential sites for ATSA. In addition, it now appears that there would be room for ATSA at Chilwell even when taking account of the requirements of the engineer resources organisation which is planned to move from Long Marston by 1998. This is a material change from the circumstances set out in the consultative document.

As a result, I have concluded that more work is required to take account of the points that have emerged during consultation and to consider formally Andover, Ludgershall and Chilwell. Although I am anxious to resolve the uncertainty felt by ATSA staff at all the current locations, our priority is to reach a conclusion in the best long-term interests of the agency, its customers and its staff. The results of this work will be subject to a further consultative process when it has been completed, and I hope to make a final decision of the location of a collocated ATSA by the end of the year.

Sandhurst Cadets

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of schools sponsoring cadets at Sandhurst, indicating the figures for each regiment. [30988]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Army Individual Training Organisation. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Elliott to Mr. Paul Murphy, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about schools sponsoring cadets at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Individual Training Organisation.

Cadets at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst are not sponsored by their schools.

A small proportion of the Cadets have come direct from school through the Entry Selection Process. However, the vast majority pass through university before going to Sandhurst.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sea King Helicopters

Mr Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report, column 54,* if he will list the number of Sea King helicopters currently in service with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force by year of entry into service; how many Sea Kings have suffered cracks in the lift frame, by year of entry into service; how many have suffered cracking to the lift frame more than once; and if he will make a statement. [30812]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is provided in the table:

Year	Aircraft delivered currently in service		Aircraft delivered 1 or more cracks	Aircraft with repeat cracks
		RN	RAF	Total[1]
1969	8	—	8	1
1970	15	—	16	3
1971	13	—	11	5
1972	5	—	5	2
1973	—	—	—	—
1974	—	—	—	—
1975	—	—	—	—
1976	5	—	4	—
1977	4	3	8	1
1978	—	11	11	8
1979	5	1	6	1
1980	9	1	10	3
1981	10	—	9	4
1982	8	—	6	1
1983	1	—	—	—
1984	10	—	7	1
1985	6	3	6	—
1986	9	—	5	—
1987	3	—	2	—
1988	—	—	—	—
1989	2	—	1	—
1990	6	—	1	1
1991	—	—	—	—
1992	—	—	—	—
1993	—	—	—	—
1994	—	—	—	—
1995	—	—	—	—
1996	—	6	—	—
Total	119	25	116	31

[1] Includes aircraft no longer in service.

Although the problem of lift frame cracking has a transitory effect on aircraft availability, the repair load is manageable, and there is no question of its affecting the ability of the Sea King to continue in service until its planned out-of-service date. Furthermore, the aircraft design is tolerant of failures and this, combined with rigorous periodic in-service inspections, maintains the good airworthiness record of the Sea King structure. No aircraft accidents have been caused by Sea King lift frame or associated component failure.

Market Testing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning market testing. [30822]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 6 February, *Official Report,* column *120.* The policy has not changed.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the projected annual savings as a result of the market testing of health provision for British forces services; and if he will make a statement. [30985]

Mr. Soames: Market testing of health provision for British forces in Germany is expected to realise annual savings of £2 million in financial year 1998–99, £3.4 million in 1999–2000, and £4 million in 2000–01. Initial set-up costs, and some dual running to facilitate a seamless transition to the new service will result in increased costs of £2.3 million in 1996–97 and £2.9 million in 1997–98. Therefore, over the five-year period of the service level agreement with "The Health Alliance", net savings of some £4.2 million are expected to accrue to the Defence budget.

These changes have been achieved with no detriment to the overall level of service which is provided to our forces and their families. Indeed, in many aspects an improved level of service has already been achieved.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* all of his Department's activities which have been contractorised or market tested, *(b)* the date of contractorisation and market testing and *(c)* the overall costs. [30986]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am writing to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Environmental Assessments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Environmental assessment his Department carries out of RAF stations or bases before they are sold or disposed of; when such assessments started; which officials within his Department carry out such assessments; if such assessments measure nuclear contamination; and to whom the results of such assessments are made available. [31266]

Mr. Soames: My Department is introducing a procedure for land quality assessment, the outcome of which is a land quality statement, which is to be applied to all sites earmarked for disposal. A prioritised programme is also being drawn up for other sites on the defence estate where such work is considered appropriate. Although the procedure has only recently been formally introduced, investigation of land quality using the present methodology commenced in 1993.

Within the RAF, the majority of such assessments are undertaken by independent specialist consultants which are managed by the defence estate organisation. Specialist in-house resources such as the RAF's explosive ordnance disposal team and the defence radiological protection service are employed where a civilian contractor might not have the relevant expertise. Reports of their findings are made available to the specialist consultant appointed to carry out the land quality assessment work.

The land quality assessment procedure is intended to cover all categories of contaminants, and where appropriate will include recommendations for and implementation of remedial action. The resulting land quality statement is made available, amongst others, to prospective purchasers. My Department complies fully with the requirements of the Environmental Information Regulations, 1992.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the implication for the environment of the Falkland islands of the grave of HMS Sheffield. [29925]

Mr. Soames: HMS Sheffield sank in deep water, some 350 miles to the east of the Falkland islands. We are confident that there is no risk to the environment of the Falklands.

Buses and Coaches

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of buses and coaches owned by, or used by, the services are now fitted with engine governors, restricting their top speed to 65 mph. [30665]

Mr. Soames: The joint service fleet of buses and coaches currently consists of 929 vehicles of mixed types, all of which have speed limiters fitted. Approximately 41 per cent. of the total fleet, which was acquired before 1988, has limiters set at 65mph. The remaining 59 per cent. is restricted to 60mph. Buses and coaches hired for service use have to comply with the speed limiter regulations in force in the country in which the vehicle is hired.

RAF Sealand

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons he has extended the deadline for bids under the market testing programme at RAF Sealand; and if he will make a statement. [30823]

Mr. Soames: The time taken to answer bidders' formal questions, to provide up to date detailed Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—TUPE—data and to amend the invitation to tender have all contributed to the extension. In order to allow bidders sufficient time to respond to ITT changes, the tender submission date has been delayed from 8 May 1996 to 12 June 1996.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many uniformed personnel are currently stationed at RAF Sealand, Deeside. [30821]

Mr. Soames: On 23 May 1996 there were 338 uniformed personnel stationed at RAF Sealand.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are employed at RAF Sealand. [30820]

Mr. Arbuthnot: On 1 April 1996 there were 1,305 MOD civilian staff employed at RAF Sealand.

Nimrod

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the current servicing contract for the RAF Nimrod fleet. [30963]

Mr. Soames: As a result of the "Competing for Quality" initiative a five-year contract was awarded to FR Aviation in March 1995. This contract provides those engineering services previously performed by the Nimrod major servicing unit at RAF Kinloss, including the maintenance of the Nimrod maritime and Nimrod reconnaissance fleets.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod aircraft are grounded and for what reasons; and if he will make a statement. [30825]

Mr. Soames: As at 20 May 1996 no Nimrod aircraft were grounded.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod aircraft are currently in service; what are their principal purposes; and if he will make a statement. [30824]

Mr. Soames: There are 27 Nimrod aircraft currently in service. In addition three aircraft are in long-term storage and a fourth aircraft is undergoing major repair. The principal purpose of the Nimrod MR2 is maritime patrol; and that of the Nimrod R1 reconnaissance.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod aircraft are serviced by companies engaged under market testing; and if he will make a statement. [30826]

Mr. Soames: As a result of the "Competing for Quality" initiative a contract was awarded to FR Aviation in March 1995 for the provision of engineering service including the maintenance of the 31 aircraft in the Nimrod fleet.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of individuals from ethnic minorities serving in each regiment and corps in the Army giving the figures for each rank. [30987]

Mr. Soames: This information is not currently available. However, in accordance with the joint action plan between the Army and the Commission for Racial Equality announced on 28 March 1996, the Army is currently undertaking a detailed survey of the ethnic composition of the Army. Classification will be in accordance with the CRE guidelines. It is intended that the results of this survey will be available by the end of the year and that the data will provide the means by which the Army will monitor the success of its equal opportunities policies. It should, at that time, be possible to derive figures about the distribution of ethnic minorities by both rank and capbadge through the Army.

Consultants

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the private consultants employed by his Department in each of the last five years; what projects they were involved with; and what was the total cost in each year. [31024]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Individual budget holders in my Department have delegated powers to employ external consultants as they think fit within the limit of their resources and consistent with all requirements for propriety and value for money. The information required has not been held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The hon. Member will however wish to note that my officials are currently collecting data from all areas of the Department to establish the total expenditure on external consultancy. The exercise covering financial year 1995–96 is nearing completion. Once the information is to hand I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Army Commissions

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* state and *(b)* private school applications were made for Army commissions in the last available year. [30984]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Retained Files

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what reasons files with the classmark ES1/542-547 recorded at the Public Record Office concerning nuclear weapon hazards from an aircraft crash between 1951 and 1959 are currently retained by his Department; and if he will consider opening them under the open government initiative; [31264]

(2) for what reasons the file with the classmark ES1/548 recorded at the Public Record Office concerning the appointment of a weapon accident investigation team between 1958 and 1964 is currently retained by his Department; and if he will consider opening it under the open government initiative. [31265]

Mr. Soames: Arrangements are being made to review ES1/542-547 and ES1/548 to establish whether release into the public domain is now possible. I will write to the hon. Member on completion of the review process.

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the basis for the sale of the married quarters estate is monthly based rent with five-yearly reviews; [31292]

(2) if bids based on index-linked rents are being considered for the sale of the married quarters estate. [31274]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We set out in the preliminary information memorandum, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, proposals for setting the rent MOD will pay for those married quarters it leases from the purchaser of the married quarters estate. The final arrangements will be settled in discussion with potential purchasers of the estate. The proposed sale of the estate will have no impact upon the arrangements whereby the charges which service personnel pay for their accommodation are independently recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Nuclear Accident Response Organisation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the duties of the Nuclear Accident Response Organisation; when this organisation was established; how many are employed within the organisation; and how many civilians are employed by the organisation. [31268]

Mr. Soames: The aim of the Nuclear Accident Response Organisation is to ensure that in conjunction with the appropriate civil agencies, there would be an effective response to safeguard the general public and MOD personnel in the unlikely event of an emergency involving defence nuclear materials.

The eight full-time staff in MOD headquarters, five of whom are civilians, give policy direction for the development and exercising of appropriate plans and procedures, but overall the NARO could draw on the skills of many hundreds of personnel across the armed forces and the MOD. Their precise number and specialisation would be dependent on the particular circumstances of an accident but it might include medical experts, health physicists, technical/design specialists, radiation monitoring experts, engineering teams, and associated logistic and other support staff. Contingency arrangements to deal with a range of accidents have existed for as long as the MOD has used nuclear material.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the procedures for informing foreign Governments if an accident involving British-controlled nuclear weapons had occurred on their soil or within their

borders; when these procedures were adopted; and under what circumstances foreign Governments have had to be warned of such accidents. [31263]

Mr. Soames: In ratifying the International Atomic Energy Agency convention of 26 September 1986 on early notification of a nuclear accident, the United Kingdom Government undertook to notify the IAEA and affected states in the event of an accident to military facilities or equipment which had or might have consequences that could be of radiological safety significance for another state. Separate bilateral arrangements have also been concluded as appropriate: the terms of these are classified. There has never been an accident involving a UK nuclear weapon which has required a foreign Government to be informed under these arrangements.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *52*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31228]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In line with central Treasury advice, this Department does not seek unconditional on-demand bonds. With regard to categories *(b)* to *(e)*, our centrally held records show there to be almost 200 current guarantees and indemnities in place dated since 1 January 1991. Our records do not differentiate between the categories as requested. An indemnity or guarantee provided under category *(c)* could cover *(b)*, *(d)* and/or *(e)*. More specific information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Military Training

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *637*, if he will make a statement on the *(a)* defence and *(b)* wider foreign policy aims underlying the decisions to provide military training assistance to (i) Indonesia, (ii) Guatemala and (iii) Sudan between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995; and what assistance is being provided to (i), (ii) and (iii) currently. [30319]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The defence and wider foreign policy aims which underlie the provision of military training assistance include the promotion of peace and stability, the spread of democratic values and the strengthening of standards in the armed forces. Details of the assistance provided is confidential between Governments; however, no military training assistance is currently being provided to Sudan.

Defence Radiological Protection Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the duties of the defence radiological protection service; how many people are employed in the service; when the service was set up; and if the service publishes an annual report. [31267]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 4 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the Defence Radiological Protection Service (DRPS) which is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

DRPS employs 75 people and provides the Ministry of Defence with technical and advisory services on all aspects of ionising and non-ionising radiation protection. DRPS also provides advice on the transport and disposal of radioactive material, carries out environmental monitoring surveys and advises on the remediation of land or buildings contaminated with radioactive substances.

DRPS was formed in 1982 from the Naval Radiological Protection Service which had been set up in 1965. It remained part of the Royal Naval Medical Service until 1 April 1996 when it became part of DERA.

DRPS has published its own Annual Report since its formation and will produce its last independent report later this summer for the financial year 1995/96. In the future information on DRPS will be included in the DERA Annual Report.

I hope this is helpful.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each of his Department's agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30115]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters fall to the chief executives of my Department's agencies and I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing in Defence Agencies. As Chief Executive of one such agency (the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), I am replying with respect to the market testing we have been conducting.

Since the launch of ABRO on 1 April 1993 the Agency has completed one market test. This competition covered the complete range of services provided by one its major business units—ABRO Bovington (covering re-manufacture of armoured fighting vehicles, including the Challenger Main Battle Tank, and also equipment repair support to the Royal Armoured Corps Centre and other local affiliated military units). The market test was won by the in-house team and a Service Level Agreement has been in place since July 1994.

The Agency is currently engaged on the market test of the equipment repair support service that it provides to Army Land Command. Recommendations on the results of this competition are due to be made to Ministers by 31 January 1997. ABRO will then have market tested activities amounting to 65% of its running costs.

The final phase of the Agency's current Competing for Quality programme will be to evaluate and implement the strategy for ABRO Donnington. This can only begin once we have the full set of experiences from the market test currently in train. I have enclosed a copy of our Corporate Plan which will give you a fuller picture of our activities.

Letter from K. J. W. Goad to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I reply to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding Market Testing activity by this Agency.

As Chief Executive I submit a nil return on behalf of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA).

Letter from C. L. Elliott to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing in Agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Individual Training Organisation (AITO).

No market tests have been completed to date. However, the AITO is in the early stages of carrying out market testing at 6 of our training establishments.

The outcome of this programme of tests will not be known for at least 18 months, and therefore I am unable to report any results at this stage.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from J. R. Prince to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing into services provided by this agency, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA).

ATSA launched in October 1995 and, to date, no market testing has been carried out.

Letter from A. H. Roache to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC) I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding what Market Testing has been carried out into the services provided by the DAC, and what were the results.

An independent study into Competing for Quality by Shreeveport Limited concluded that Market Testing was not viable for the DAC and therefore the matter was taken no further.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA).

A market testing review of the Agency was carried out shortly after its launch in July 1992. The study team concluded that the Agency as a whole should remain in the public sector. A reappraisal in February 1995 also considered that the bulk of the work of the Agency should be retained in-house though there was some opportunity for contracting out.

Competing for Quality figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for the Agency's Efficiency Plan. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

Letter from T. R. Thurgate to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing of the Defence Bills Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

There are no plans to market test the work of the DBA. The task of the DBA was formerly carried out by the now disbanded Defence Accounts Agency. Under market testing rules, an in-house bid which represented substantial savings was submitted. Ministers accepted the bid and the DBA was formed.

Letter from R. N. Dixon to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing in the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

As part of the procedure which resulted in the formation of the DCTA on 22 November 1994, full consideration was given to the "prior options". This included an exhaustive examination of whether the services of the Agency could be better provided through contractorisation or privatisation, in whole or in part. The conclusion then was that they could not. There has been no market testing of the services provided by the Agency in the period since it formation.

It should be noted, however, that a very substantial proportion of DCTA expenditure is already being placed externally through the normal competitive process. Cash expenditure by DCTA in 1995/96 totalled £137M of which £124M (90%) represented money spent on the purchase of clothing, textiles and general stores, as well as externally-sourced R&D effort and support services. Contracts for these goods and services were placed in full compliance with government requirements for open competition between suppliers.

Letter from C. Roberts to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

Your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about Market Testing falls within the responsibilities of the Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency. I am responding on the Chief Executive's behalf during his absence on duty.

The Defence Dental Agency was formed on 1 March 1996. This was in line with the recommendation of Defence Cost Study 15 that the three single Service dental branches should be brought together into a single tri-Service Directorate and considered for Agency status. Prior to the launch of the Agency a Competing for Quality feasibility study was completed by outside consultants. The Study concluded that neither market testing, privatisation nor contractorization of Defence primary dental services were feasible options, but made a number of recommendations on efficiency which are now being implemented.

I hope that this is of help.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

Your recent question to Secretary of State for Defence asked for details on market testing carried out in his Department's agencies. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

I should begin by explaining that DERA was only formed on 1 April 1995 when the Defence Research Agency (DRA) joined with other Ministry of Defence research and evaluation organisations to form a single science and technology Agency. The figures for Market Testing initiatives, which I set out below, however refer mainly to the period from April 1991 when the DRA was a separate Agency. They are:

Area	*Financial year*	*Value of service reviewed (£ million)*	*Outcomes*
a. DRA Experimental Flying	1992–93	26.2	Contract award to in-house MOD team based at Boscombe Down.
b. DRA Site Services	1993–94 1994–95	45.0 90.0	Market Test suspended in May 1994 when competition at early sites in programme revealed that equivalent savings could be obtained organisationally by restructuring requirements.

Area	Financial year	Value of service reviewed (£ million)	Outcomes
c. DRA Engineering Services	1994–95	47.0	Market Test suspended. Savings achieved by combination of prior options review of requirement and rationalisation.
d. DRA Financial Accounting	1994–95	3.1	Award made to in-house team after competition.
e. IS Data Telecoms	1994–95	1.0	Overtaken by rationalisation measures.

Market Testing is only one part of a wider Competing for Quality Programme pursued by this Agency. For the period between April 1995 and March 1996 this programme has been incorporated into the DERA's Corporate Planning process. This has resulted in the proposal, currently under consideration, for the privatisation of the support services elements of DERA as announced by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 27 March 1996. It is anticipated that information on this efficiency programme will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from T. McG Brown to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency.

Three Agency functions have been market tested so far. The Mill Hill catering and stewardship functions where the contract was awarded to Gardner Merchant Ltd. The mall sorting functions at St Giles Court and Mill Hill together with the MOD Van Service were subsumed into our Mail 2000 Initiative, part of the Defence Cost Studies programme, and hence remained in house.

I hope this is helpful, please let me know if you require any further information.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing of services provided as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

Contractorisation of Meteorological Office work has historically run at a high level. The attached table gives the details, in terms of staff costs, of what further gains we have so far achieved as a consequence of the Government's market testing initiative.

Work continues to examine the scope for market testing in a number of other areas of the Office.

I hope you find this information useful.

Activity	Number of staff (before efficiencies)	Annual value (£000) (staff costs)	Efficiencies made (Percentage)
Library and Archives	17	230	25
Corporate Communications	25	510	11
Personnel Administration Services	19	240	22
It Operations Centre	22	598	32
Supply and Services	61	851	22

Letter from R. G. Smith to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing by Agencies as this matter, in respect of my Agency, falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA).

The DSCA was only launched on 30 April 1996; I have not yet implemented any market testing programmes. However, we are undertaking scoping work in order to identify areas suitable for market testing in the future. In this respect, I regard support services as being particularly suitable for this sort of exercise. I therefore intend, if the possibility exists, to subject all support services to some form of competition including market testing where appropriate.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from M. G. R. Hodson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about market testing, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency.

The only market test taking place in this agency is that of the MOD Freight Distribution Service. The Feasibility Study commenced in October 1994 and, following Trades Unions consultation, an Invitation to Tender was issued on 26 January 1996 to 4 commercial tenderers and a tri-Service in-house bid team. Tenders were due in by 30 May 1996. Results are currently planned to be announced in November 1996. Once this particular market test is completed, over 90% of DTMX business will have been market tested.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing in my agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

No market testing was carried out within the Disposal Sales Agency between October 1994, when we achieved agency status, and March 1995.

CFQ figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for my agency's Efficiency Plan. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing as this matter falls within my area of responsibility of Chief Executive of the Duke of York's Royal Military School.

No market testing was carried out prior to March 1995 into the services we provide.

CFQ figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for our Agency's Efficiency Plan. It is anticipated that the information will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

Letter from J. P. Clarke to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question concerning the extent to which market testing had been carried out within Agencies of the Ministry of Defence. As the Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency, the issue raised falls within my area of responsibility and I have been asked to reply to you.

The simple answer to your question is that no market testing has been carried out into the services provided by the Hydrographic Office. Given the paucity of this response it might be of some benefit if I were to expand a little on this statement.

The Hydrographic Office, during 1993 and 1994 conducted a number of internal studies into various activities to ascertain if market testing represented a feasible and realistic method of achieving value for money. In the event, the Hydrographic Office Board concluded that a formal Market Testing programme would not be conducted as it was not, for various reasons, considered to be an appropriate option. However, the various feasibility studies highlighted a number of areas and activities where it was felt further efficiency savings could be made. In light of this a formal Efficiency Programme was instigated with the aim of realising savings, commensurate with those which could have been expected from market testing. This programme was successful with savings targets being met in both financial years 1994/95 and 1995/96.

I hope the above information has been helpful.

Letter from N. J. Pearson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre Defence Agency. The Agency, which is only 2 months old, has not carried a market test of any of the services which it provides.

Letter from A. W. Pollard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what market testing has been carried out into the services that Agencies provide. As Chief Executive, this falls within my area of responsibility for the Logistic Information Systems Agency (LISA).

Although LISA was included in the Market Testing programme prior to its launch as an Agency in November 1994, the activity to be tested was subsumed by the Agency's CFQ Partnership initiative. This culminated in the award of a contract in December 1995 to EDS. Under the terms of this contract, all LISA non-core activity is being transferred to the Private Sector partner who will continue to provide these services on site under GOCO arrangements. The bulk of the transfer took place on 1 March 1996 with the remainder to follow by April 1997. It is anticipated that final CFQ figures for the year ending March 1996 will be published in this year's Next Steps Review.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from B. E. Nimick to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about Market testing, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency.

The Medical Supplies Agency was established "to ensure the cost effective and timely provision of medical, dental and veterinary material, blood and blood products, technical and logistic support and trained personnel to the UK Armed Forces worldwide". It was initially proposed that the provision of these services be subject to a market test. However, Defence Cost Study 15 recommended that this should be cancelled and that the wider system covering medical supply, provisioning points and other medical stores should undergo agency review.

As a consequence of this review, this Agency came into being on 1 March 1996 and copies of the Framework Document and Corporate Plan have been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Our efficiency programme is estimated to achieve savings of £27m over the 10 year Long Term Costing period. Clearly it is too early in the life of the Agency to have completed market testing exercises for the services we provide, but our corporate plan identifies the strategies designed to deliver value for money and cost effective services. In brief these strategies are to:

(a) Utilize the Private Sector for direct deliveries of medical material of end users and the setting up of dormant contracts, where appropriate, to enable a percentage of War Maintenance Reserve (WMR) to be held by trade. This would drive down the need to hold stocks and limit the storage facilities to the minimum required for operational purposes.

(b) Factor out the non-core functions to the most cost effective provider, whether Public or Private sector. This in turn will enable a further rationalisation of sites within the medical supply organisation. There are a number of areas where Service Level Agreements with other MOD authorities, who are also pursuing efficiency programmes, would be appropriate, for example, Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA) and Director of Transport and Movement Executive (DTM(X)). Emphasis will be placed on customer satisfaction through both control of supply and distribution. With the resultant rise in customer confidence, it is expected that there will be a corresponding reduction in local stock holdings.

(c) Develop partnership arrangements with authorities beyond MOD either in Industry or other elements of the Public Sector such as the Buying Agency and the National Health Service Supplies Authority (NHSSA). Discussions with a variety of existing and potential suppliers are being carried out.

(d) Commission a review of policy concerning range and standardisation of material. Proposals for rationalising range and prescribing policy will be submitted to the Surgeon General for approval. This will achieve a reduction in programme costs.

As these measures are carried out, the Medical Supply Organisation will reduce in size and will eventually have a core of service medical personnel, with the necessary clinical skills, working closely with a civilian team to provide a compact multi-disciplined team. This will be the source of purchasing, provisioning, clinical and technical support to advise the Surgeon General and provide him with advice with regard to the acquisition of material and related services and to support Operations more effectively through integrated Operational Supply Chains.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from P. R. Wildman to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing carried out by government agencies. This matter falls within my area of responsibility, as Chief Executive, as far as the Military Survey Defence Agency is concerned.

No market testing has been completed by Military Survey to date. The three initiatives started in 1993 ceased to be candidates when they fell below revised financial thresholds. However, these initiatives have now been reviewed under Competing For Quality (CFQ) guidelines and a new CFQ programme is being developed. It is anticipated that further information will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review and the 1996/7 Agency Annual Report.

Letter from W. E. E. Boreham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing, as this falls into my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency.

The non-core activities of Ministry of Defence Police business were market tested as part of our prior options exercise, which resulted in the placement of contracts, at MDP Wethersfield, covering catering, estate management, grounds maintenance, accommodation services, cleaning and administration, effective from April 1993. The resultant savings are in excess of £300K per annum.

Letter from W. S. Graham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, that asked what market testing has been carried out into the services provided by the 'Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO)' and what were the results, as the matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the NARO.

2. No market testing has been carried out in respect of services provided by the NARO.

Letter from J. H. S. McAnally to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question, about agency Market Testing (MT) initiatives, in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA).

The NRTA came into being on 1 April 1995. During the 1980s and prior to the formation of the Ministry of Defence Market Testing Organisation, the Royal Navy contracted out a number of shore establishment support activities, such as catering, cleaning and grounds maintenance.

In March 1995, one small Market Test was successfully concluded at the Britannia Royal Naval College boat maintenance facility at Sandquay, Dartmouth. In addition, MT feasibility studies were conducted in late 1994, at two NRTA shore training establishments. Both of these studies concluded independently that further scope for possible savings from MT were likely to be limited and would involve multiple, management intensive, tests of small identifiable units, with the accompanying need for, and expense of, consultancy support for in-house team bidders. As a consequence, the NRTA is developing a Partnering Initiative as an alternative to the traditional MT approach, whilst still complying with Governmental Competing for Quality (CFQ) policy. The Partnering Initiative will, in addition to providing "standard" CFQ savings in services delivery, provide a third party income stream to help offset the overhead costs of the NRTA infrastructure.

Letter from M. A. Rowe to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing where it relates to my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Pay & Personnel Agency.

My Agency was launched on 1 February 1996 and no market testing of the services we provide has been carried out.

Letter from S. B. Burdess to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying, on behalf of Air Vice-Marshal R. H. Kyle, who is currently on leave, to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing within his Department's Agencies as this matter falls within his responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency (RAF MGDA).

Competing for Quality figures for the period between April 1995 and March 1996 are being compiled for our Agency's Efficiency Plan. It is anticipated that this information will be published in the 1996 Nest Steps Review.

Letter from P. C. Ayee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he would list for each of his Department's Agencies what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide, and what the results were. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment.

My Agency is currently market testing a multi-activity package of its supporting activities, covering motor transport, provisioning, catering, information technology, communications and selected administrative services, and valued at £8m per annum in pay costs. Five external bids and one in-house bid have been received and are currently being evaluated. The successful bidder is expected to be announced in time for implementation of the results in January 1997.

Letter from J. A. G. May to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about market testing of services insofar as this bears on my responsibilities for the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency.

Up to 31 March 1995, the following activities contributed to the Agency's response to the Defence Market Testing Initiative and the targets set by Departmental Plan 92:

(a) *Support Services at Royal Air Force Scampton.* The Support Services at Royal Air Force Scampton were contractorized. The Station has since been closed.

(b) *The Joint Elementary Flying Training Squadron at Royal Air Force Topcliffe.* The Joint Elementary Flying Training Squadron at Royal Air Force Topcliffe was contractorized. The Squadron, together with the Contractor, has since moved to Royal Air Force Barkston Heath.

(c) *Supply Services at Royal Air Force Locking.* The market test of the Supply Services at Royal Air Force Locking was put into abeyance pending decisions on the future of the Station. It has since been decided to close the Station.

Except for the outcome of the recent competition in respect of Support Services at Royal Air Force Valley, which we hope will be announced shortly, the Agency's Competing for Quality forward programme for the period from 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 has yet to be finalized. It is expected that the outstanding conclusions will be published in the 1996 Next Steps Review.

I am sending a copy of this letter to my Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

Letter from I. S. Mitchelson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence relating to market testing within each of his Department's Agencies, insofar as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Service Children's Education.

For the period up until March 1996 this Agency had not yet completed the market testing of any of its services. This Agency is, however, currently involved in a wider market test concerning Army Catering and Mess Services in Germany. The project is being led by the United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) and the market test includes catering and cleaning in Service Schools in Germany; contractual arrangements are planned to be effective from 1 October 1997.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what market testing has been carried out into the services we provide and the results thereof as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Queen Victoria School.

Since Queen Victoria School became an Agency on 1st April 1992 no market testing has been carried out into the services we provide. We currently have no plans to carry out market testing in the future.

If you have any further questions about this please do not hesitate to contact me.

TREASURY

Tax Complaints

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many cases investigated by the revenue adjudicator in each year since 1993 have been settled; and if he will make a statement; [29601]

(2) how many complaints in each year since May 1993, have been fully investigated by the revenue adjudicator; and if he will make a statement. [29605]

Mr. Jack: The following table shows the number of full investigations of complaints about the Inland Revenue which the adjudicator completed in the three years to 31 March 1996:

Year	*Complaints taken up for investigation*	*Complaints settled in the year*
1993–94	308	105
1994–95	504	381
1995–96	470	495

On 31 March 1996, the adjudicator had 301 complaints under full investigation.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the levels of unemployment that would be optimal for successful economic convergence prior to entering the European monetary union. [30468]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The criteria against which member states will be assessed when determining whether they have successfully converged prior to entering the European monetary union are set out in article 109j of the treaty establishing the European Community. Levels of unemployment are not included among these criteria. But having an efficient and flexible labour market increases competitiveness and generates growth and employment.

The United Kingdom labour market is one of the least regulated in the European Union with an impressive record on job creation, and we have more people in jobs and fewer out of work than any other major European country.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report,* column *567,* what was the average cost of answering an *(a)* oral and *(b)* written parliamentary question for April of the current year; and if he will put the information and statistics on which this calculation is based in the Library. [30470]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information required to calculate the average cost of answering parliamentary questions for April 1996 is not yet available. The calculation is dependent upon the availability of data on movements in earnings, published annually in October. I am arranging for details of the basis of the April 1995 calculation to be placed in the Library.

Debt Servicing Bill

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual reduction in the Government's debt servicing bill in the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01 resulting from a fall in United Kingdom interest rates of 1.5 per cent. across all maturities of the yield curve. [30594]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The forecast reductions in net central Government interest payments resulting from a half of 1 per cent. fall in interest rates across the yield curve are as follows: *(a)* 1996–97 £0.3 billion, *(b)* 1997–98 £0.5 billion, *(c)* 1998–99 £0.6 billion, *(d)* 1999–2000 £0.7 billion, *(e)* 2000–2001 to £0.7 billion.

These reductions are calculated using the 1995 Budget forecast for borrowing and assume that the half point fall is sustained throughout the forecast.

Road Traffic Offences

Sir David Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will earmark a major proportion of revenue raised from road traffic penalties to be used for increased preventive measures. [30676]

Mr. Waldegrave: Revenue raised through either fines or taxes is paid into the Consolidated Fund. Priorities for public expenditure are settled through the public expenditure survey process.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30544]

Mr. Jack: The information for HM Treasury is given in the table. On 1 April 1996, all Treasury staff transferred from their old grades, into new, broad pay ranges. Staff who were in the old grades of administrative assistant and administrative officer are now in pay ranges A and B respectively.

	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Female (per cent.)*
Pay range A	26	52	78	67
Pay range B	71	174	245	71
Pay range C	75	75	150	50
Pay range D	178	93	271	34
Pay range E	187	67	254	26
Pay range F	68	13	81	16
Pay range G	15	4	19	21
Pay range H	11	0	11	—
Total	631	478	1,109	43

Housing Stock Sales (VAT)

Mr. Donohoe: Top ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of value added tax pertains to the sale of housing stock owned by a development corporation to a housing association, [30542]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Value added tax is not levied on the sale of housing, irrespective of who supplies it to whom. Generally, new housing is zero rated and other housing is exempt from VAT.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use his Department has made of private detective

agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30560]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has not used any private detective agencies or investigators during the years in question.

Vehicles (Disabled Use)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what guidance is given to local VAT offices to enable them to decide which types of vehicles are eligible for class three zero rating for disabled use; [30967]

(2) if he will list the rules of eligibility for class three vehicles to qualify for zero rating for disabled road use; and if he will make a statement; [30965]

(3) what plans he has to classify all-terrain vehicles as being eligible for class three zero rating for the purposes of VAT when used on public roads by people with disabilities; [30964]

(4) what measures would be required to classify all-terrain vehicles as eligible for class three zero rating; [30968]

(5) if he will list those types of vehicle which currently qualify for zero rating for disabled purposes on public roads. [30966]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The legal definition of an invalid carriage, under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act 1970, is a vehicle constructed or adapted for the use of a disabled person. For VAT purposes class three invalid carriages, like classes one and two qualify for zero rating when supplied to a disabled person or to a charity which makes them available for use by a disabled person. The construction requirements for class three invalid carriages are set out in The Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations 1988 which are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

For VAT purposes all-terrain vehicles will qualify for zero rating if they are designed solely for use by disabled people when supplied to a disabled person or to a charity for making available to disabled people. Local VAT offices are issued with general guidance on what equipment is designed solely for use by a disabled person. The only types of vehicles for use on public roads qualifying for the zero rate are those class three invalid carriages which are permitted to use the roads.

Investment Income Surcharge

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the probable yield of an investment income surcharge in the year 1997–98 at the equivalent rates to those abolished in 1984. [30995]

Mr. Jack: The estimated full-year yield if introducing a 15 per cent. surcharge to investment income above £13,000, which is the 1983–84 level of revalorisation to 1996–97, would be about £1.1 billion at 1996–97 income levels. The yield for 1997–98 would depend on levels of incomes in that year.

Assets

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total value of *(a)* United Kingdom assets based overseas and *(b)* foreign-owned assets based in the United Kingdom. [30797]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The total value of identified United Kingdom overseas assets recorded at the end of 1995 was £1,613 billion. The total value of identified UK liabilities recorded at the end of 1995 was £1,597 billion.

Smuggling

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many flexible anti-smuggling teams have been established; and what plans he has to establish more in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [31098]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The composition of flexible anti-smuggling teams varies from place to place and time to time according to Customs assessment of the resources needed to carry out controls. Consequently the number of teams is not meaningful.

Approximately 2,250 officers are currently deployed on anti-smuggling duties. There are no plans to increase this number in 1996–97 or 1997–98.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many brigades have been established to tackle drug smuggling; and what plans he has to establish more in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [31097]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In anti-smuggling terms, brigades are not forces additional to normal anti-smuggling complement. They are forces assembled temporarily on a local basis, and deployed outside their normal operational area to address specific targets or to test risk. Consequently they are not formally established and the question of numbers of brigades does not arise.

Small Business Compliance

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposed pilot scheme to aid small business compliance. [29954]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* There is a wide range of work underway in the Chancellor's Departments, including a number of pilots, to reduce the compliance burdens of business in complying with their various tax obligations. For example, there are a number of pilots within the joint working programme between the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency—announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 19 September—including plans for joint seminars for small businesses, a national helpline for employers and a review of forms and leaflets. All are well on course.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual budget for his departmental deregulation unit; how many staff it employs; and of these how many *(a)* are career civil servants and of what grades, *(b)* have been seconded from business, and *(c)* have experience of the private sector. [30056]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Within the Chancellor's Departments much of the work on particular deregulation issues is carried out by the policy teams with overall responsibility for those particular issues. Separate units do exist within the Treasury, Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue and the Office for National Statistics which have the responsibility of co-ordinating the deregulation effort of these departments, but in each case, deregulation represents only part of the workload of these units.

Treasury

In the Treasury, deregulation work is co-ordinated by the competition, deregulation and energy team, which has total annual budget of £231,048. The team has seven staff, comprising one grade 5, one (part time) grade 7, one HEO(D), one HEO, one assistant economist (half time equivalent, also has duties in another team), one AO and one personal secretary. Of these the grade 5, HEO, AO and personal secretary spend part of their time dealing with deregulation. All of these staff are career civil servants; none have been seconded from business.

HM Customs and Excise

In Customs and Excise, deregulation is co-ordinated by the business unit, which allocates £80,000 of its annual budget to work on this issue. Within the unit, one grade 7 and one HEO work full time, and one EO works half time on deregulation. All of these staff are career civil servants; none have been seconded from business.

Office for National Statistics

The survey control and deregulation unit of the Office for National Statistics has a total annual budget of £162,500. This unit has six staff, comprising one grade 7, two HEOs, one EO, and two AOs, all of whom spend part of their time dealing with deregulation. All of these staff are career civil servants; none have been seconded from business.

Inland Revenue

Inland Revenue's departmental deregulation unit has six staff, comprising one grade 5, a grade 6, two grade 7s, one SEO one personal secretary. This unit is a subdivision of a larger team, which has various other responsibilities, and there are no separate figures available covering the costs of deregulation work. All of these staff are career civil servants; none have been seconded from business.

Many of the officials listed, in each of the four departmental deregulation units, will have experience of contacts with the private sector, whether in the course of their present duties, or gained in previous posts. Each of these departments have separate internal accounting systems, so the figures for expenditure by the various deregulation units are not available on the same basis.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the savings accruing to public funds from campaigns against tax fraud in each year since 1979; [30415]

(2) how many staff have been employed full time by the Treasury in tackling tax fraud for each year since 1979; [30418]

(3) how much was spent by his Department on publicity campaigns against tax fraud for each year since 1979. [30420]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* It is not possible to isolate resources relating to fraud cases from other tax investigation work, but I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 3 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *503* about the resources used for tax investigations generally back to 1988–89. Accurate figures are not available as far back as 1979.

The Inland Revenue seeks all appropriate opportunities to publicise its compliance activities. Publicity is sought for every successful Revenue prosecution and significant levels of press coverage have been achieved for its compliance work. In addition, contributions have been given to radio and television programmes, with occasional full-length feature programmes about the Revenue's work including its anti-evasion operations.

Given the varied nature of all this publicity, it is not possible to estimate its actual impact on tax revenues.

Premium Bonds

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will lower the limit on the minimum purchase of premium bonds to £10. [30249]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* No. The increase in the minimum purchase to £100 was made in July 1989. At the time of the change the average purchase of premium bonds was £150. It is now much higher, at £1,730.

Employment Growth

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was for each year since 1991 the percentage change in employment growth on the previous year for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the European Union, *(c)* the United States of America and *(d)* Japan. [30161]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The information requested is held in the 1995 edition of "Labour Force Statistics 1973–1993" in table 6.0—"Civilian Employment". More recent data are available for countries that compile labour force statistics on a monthly or quarterly basis in the "Quarterly Labour Force Statistics Number 1 1996". These books are published by the Organisation for Economic C0-operation and Development and copies are available in the Library.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the estimated cost to the Treasury in 1997–98 of moving to payments on account of one twenty-fourth of companies' VAT liabilities in accordance with the requirements of the Value Added Tax (Payment on Account) (Amendment) Order 1996; [30223]

(2) what is the estimated income to the Treasury in 1997–98 of removing the seven-day extension to the time for companies making VAT payments on account in accordance with the requirements of the Value Added Tax (Payment on Account) (Amendment) Order 1996. [30224]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The effect on total VAT collected of the package of changes to the payments on account scheme is nil in 1997–98. There is however a cash flow gain to the Treasury of approximately £30 million from removing the seven-day extension to the time for companies making VAT payments on account. This is offset by a cash flow loss to the Treasury of approximately £65 million from

moving to payments on account of one twenty-fourth of companies' VAT liabilities. There is therefore a net cash flow loss of £35 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received concerning the situation of the British hostages held in Kashmir. [30685]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As the House is aware there have been reports that the hostages may be dead. We continue to work with the Indian Government to assess whether these reports are true, and to keep the families and constituency MPs fully informed. Until we have reason to do otherwise we shall continue to work for the hostages' safe release.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30546]

Mr. David Davis: The details requested are given in the tables. The figures are from the annual staff in post return as at 1 April 1996, including part-time staff.

The corresponding figures as at 1 April 1995 for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing are given in table 6 on page 16 of the FCO departmental report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

FCO (Diplomatic wing)

Grade	Male	Female	Total	Percentage female
1/DS1	10	0	10	0
2/DS2	30	2	32	6
3/DS3	108	3	111	3
4	1	0	1	0
5/DS4	283	19	302	6
6/DS5S	82	18	100	18
7/DS5	472	99	571	17
SEO/DS6	320	56	376	15
HEO(D)/DS7D/8	110	51	161	32
HEO/DS7M	780	169	949	18
EO/DS9	926	624	1,550	40
AO/DS10/EA	537	893	1,430	62
AA/SGB2	151	109	260	42
Total	3,810	2,043	5,853	35

Overseas aid administration

Grade	Male	Female	Total	Percentage female
1	1	0	1	0
2	1	0	1	0
3	8	0	8	0

Overseas aid administration

Grade	Male	Female	Tot	Percentage [illegible]
4	0	0	0	—
5	28	7	35	20
6	39	11	50	22
7	69	22	91	24
SEO	33	14	47	30
HEO	106	52	158	33
EO	120	81	201	40
AO	124	214	338	63
AA	29	51	80	64
Total	558	452	1,010	45

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30562]

Mr. David Davis: Neither the FCO diplomatic wing nor the Overseas Development Administration has made any use of private detective agencies or investigators.

Peru

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards securing agreement on options to deal with Peruvian indebtedness to the United Kingdom. [30534]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are ready to take part with other Paris Club creditors in a further rescheduling of Peru's official bilateral debts once agreement has been reached with the International Monetary Fund on a new economic reform programme. This is expected in the next month or so.

It has recently been suggested that the British Government should use aid funds to cancel some of Peru's debts in return for the Peruvian Government using the local currency equivalent to fund development projects. We believe, however, that is more effective to fund these activities directly: our aid programme to Peru amounts to some £2.5 million a year. The Overseas Development Administration wrote off Peru's aid debts of some £5 million in 1994.

CFE Conference

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the conventional forces in Europe review conference. [30509]

Mr. David Davis: The CFE review conference which ended in Vienna on 31 May was the first operational review of the CFE treaty. During the conference, agreements were reached which resolved the outstanding implementation problems of Russia's non-compliance with the treaty's flank limits and with its commitments to destroy equipment east of the Urals. States parties also agreed to begin immediately a process of discussion

aimed at promoting the objectives of the treaty and enhancing its viability and effectiveness in Europe's changing security environment.

Overseas Visits (Royal Family)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *362*, if he will give a breakdown of the costs incurred by his Department in respect of royal visits abroad in each year since 1990–91. [30034]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* It is not possible to provide a breakdown of expenditure for financial years 1990–91 and 1991–92 without incurring disproportionate cost.

For 1992–93, I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on 16 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *64* and 24 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *239* to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). Those replies reflected total costs to the Department at that time amounting to £423,500. The full outturn figure for that year amounted to £455,695.

For 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 the breakdown is as follows:

Financial year 1993–94

	£
The Duke of Edinburgh to the Caribbean, 9–26 March 1993	20,900
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Hungary, 4–7 May 1993	64,000
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Cyprus (CHOGM), 18–24 October 1993	39,100
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to the Caribbean 18 February–10 March 1994	115,500
The Prince of Wales to France, 3–7 December 1992	400
The Prince of Wales to Germany, 14 April 1993	300
The Prince of Wales to Poland, 17–20 May 1993	12,200
The Prince of Wales to Turkey, 6–8 October 1993	5,300
The Prince of Wales to The Gulf, 7–12 November 1993	27,000
The Princess of Wales to Nepal, 2–6 March 1993	16,400
The Princess of Wales to Luxembourg, 17 September 1993	2,700
The Duke of York to Gibraltar, 1–3 October 1993	4,400
The Prince Edward to Madrid, 13–14 May 1993	600
The Prince Edward to Swaziland, 4–7 September 1993	17,600
The Prince Edward to West Africa, 26 October–4 November 1993	6,800
The Princess Royal to Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, 9–20 July 1993	19,900
The Princess Royal to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Vietnam, 22 February–6 March 1994	29,400
The Duke of Kent to Tanzania, 29 March–2 April 1993	300
The Duchess of Kent to Seychelles, 3–6 December 1993	26,100
The Duchess of Kent to Cote D'Ivoire, 6–8 February 1994	400
Princess Alexandra to Austria, 24–27 October 1993	4,100
Princess Alexandra to USA, 31 October–3 November 1993	24,800
Princess Alexandra to Copenhagen, 15–18 November 1994	6,300
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Canada, June/July 1992	11,500
The Queen to Germany, 1992	15,800
The Princess of Wales to Harare, 9–13 July 1993	900
The Queen and Prince Philip to Brussels, 7 August 1993	1,500
The Prince and Princess of Wales to Brussels, 26 October 1993	
Visit of The Prince of Wales to USA, 12–14 February 1993	300
Airfares for the visit of Princess Alexandra to the Caribbean, 27 October–7 November 1992	1,100
Visit of The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Canada, 13–24 August 1994	13,400
Visit of The Prince and Princess of Wales to Nigeria, 15–19 March 1990	5,900
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Zimbabwe, 10–15 October 1991	3,100
Miscellaneous (including a throwback payment from the previous financial year and minor sums of less than £100 for other visits, and general costs)	–6,200

Financial year 1994–95

	£
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Russia, 17–21 October 1994	116,300
The Duke of Edinburgh to South Africa, 10–11 May 1994	12,300
The Duke of Gloucester to Belgium, 4 May 1994	300
Princess Alexandra to Copenhagen, 15–18 November 1994	6,500
The Prince of Wales to St. Petersburg, 16–19 May 1994	24,100
The Princess Royal to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Vietnam, 22–28 February 1994	6,100
The Duke of Edinburgh to the Caribbean, 18 February–10 March 1994	1,300
The Prince of Wales to France, 16 March 1994	1,700
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan, 4–16 October 1994	35,700
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to the Caribbean, 18 February–10 March 1994	2,800
The Prince of Wales to Budapest, 27–28 June 1994	2,900
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh to Canada, 13–23 August, 1994	14,500
Princess Alexandra to Hong Kong and India, 14–17 October 1994	27,300
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Crimea, 13–15 September 1994	2,000
The Prince of Wales to Berlin, 27 May 1994	1,700
The Prince of Wales to Prague, 3–5 June 1994	2,200
The Princess Royal to South Africa, 21 November–1 December 1994	58,900
The Princess of Wales to Brussels, 25 October 1993	800
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Lisbon, 21–24 November 1994	5,000
The Duke and Duchess of Kent to Hong Kong, 25 November–December	25,700
The Duke of Edinburgh to The Caribbean, 10–25 March 1993	6,500
The Prince of Wales to Australia and New Zealand, 23 January–11 February 1994	5,700
The Prince of Wales to Los Angles and Hong Kong, 31 October–10 November 1994	53,300
The Duke of York to France, 13–15 August 1994	1,200
The Duke of York to Belgium, 1–6 September 1994	3,500
The Duchess of Kent to the Ivory Coast, 6–8 February 1994	4,000
The Duchess of Kent to Germany, 4–5 May 1994	1,500
The Duke of Kent to Italy, 14–16 May 1994	1,100
The Duke of York to Argentina, 14–18 November 1994	31,300
The Duke of Edinburgh to Israel, 30–31 October 1994	2,000
State Visit to South Africa, 18–26 March 1995	56,3000

Financial year 1994–95

	£
The Princess Royal to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh 5–13 March 1995	22,400
The Princess Margaret to San Francisco, Los Angles 29–30 June 1995	11,000
The Prince of Wales to Egypt, Morocco, 11–18 March 1995	4,100
Duke of Kent to Dresden, 12–14 February 1995	100
Miscellaneous (including minor sums for other visits, official gifts on inward State Visits).	6,200

Financial Year 1995–96

	£
Duke of Kent to Dresden, 12–14 February 1995	800
State Visit to South Africa, 18–26 March 1995	29,600
The Duke of Gloucester to Dunkirk, 28 May 1995	600
The Duchess of Kent to Hong Kong, 25–11 December 1994	3,400
The Princess Royal to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, 5–13 March 1995	6,900
State Visit to Russia, 17–21 October 1994	800
The Duchess of Kent to Brussels, 16 June 1995	1,100
The Prince of Wales to Egypt, 11–18 March 1995	18,200
Princess Margaret to San Francisco, 23–29 June 1995	11,300
Prince of Wales to Dublin, 31 May to 1 June 1995	3,900
Prince of Wales to Hamburg, 2–3 May 1995	1,900
The Duke and Duchess of Kent to Kiel, 19–21 June	7,800
The Queen to the Caribbean, February 1994	22,900
The Princess of Wales to Moscow (recce costs), 15–16 June 1995	2,500
The Princess of Wales to Japan (recce costs), 5–9 February 1995	3,800
The Prince Edward to Zimbabwe, 30 August to 2 September 1995	13,100
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Mexico, 20–23 November 1995	25,100
The Prince Edward to Luxembourg, 15–16 September 1995	400
The Prince of Wales to Paris, 31 August 1995	400
The Duke of Edinburgh to France, 8 May 1995	1,200
The Duke and Duchess of Kent to Oslo, 7–8 May 1995	2,200
The Duchess of Kent to The Hague, 1 June 1995	1,000
The Duke of Kent to Singapore, 10–12 September 1995	11,500
The Prince of Wales to Germany, 13–17 November 1995	17,000
The Princess Royal to New Zealand, 29 September to 5 October 1995	500
The Duke of York to Gibraltar, 13–14 July 1995	700
The Queen to New Zealand for CHOGM, 30 October to 11 November 1995	68,500
The Prince of Wales to Oman, 1–3 October 1995	9,100
The Princess of Wales to Argentina (recce costs), 23–26 November 1995	7,400
Princess Alexandra to Africa, 14–23 October 1995	10,600
The Princess Royal to Ireland, 19–20 January 1996	700
State Visit to The Czech Republic and Poland, 25–29 March 1996	114,600
The Princess Royal to The Gulf, November 1995	11,500
The Princess Royal to The Falklands, January 1996	900
The Prince of Wales, 6 November 1995	400
Miscellaneous (including minor sums for other visits, and general costs)	2,800

Russian Citizens (Visas)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for the issue of visas to Russian citizens to visit the United Kingdom did not proceed to the issue of a visa or a formal refusal, in each of the last five years. [30804]

Mr. David Davis: The following are the figures for visit visa applications by Russian nationals, withdrawn or lapsed, in the last five years:

	Moscow	*St. Petersburg*	*Total*
1995	2,307	278	2,585
1994	2,273	245	2,518
1993	890	17	907
1992	230	0	230
1991	154	0	154

Council of Ministers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many decisions have been taken by the Council of Ministers since 1 January which were reached by *(a)* qualified majority and *(b)* unanimity. [31181]

Mr. David Davis: This information is not yet available. I shall write to the hon. Member when we have it.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, columns *56–57*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31226]

Mr. David Davis: The information requested is not centrally held and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bosnia

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the UN implementation force's—IFOR—current policy towards those held responsible for crimes against humanity in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement. [31152]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: IFOR will detain and transfer to the international criminal tribunal for former Yugoslavia any persons indicated by the tribunal with whom it comes into contact in the performance of its mission.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Barristers

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reference to a declaration is contained in his warrant in respect of barristers taking silk. [27568]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We warrant signifying the appointment of Queen's counsel will continue to make no reference to the declaration which will continue to be made when the appointee has tendered the warrant to the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland.

Decommissioning

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he has shown the Government of the Republic of Ireland the text of his draft legislation for decommissioning arms and explosives; [31091]

(2) if the Government of the Republic of Ireland has been asked to show him or his officials the text of their draft legislation for decommissioning arms and explosives; and if he will make a statement. [31103]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Both Governments are co-operating closely in drawing up legislation designed to underpin any decommissioning scheme.

Fisheries

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answers of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *794*, and 12 February, *Official Report*, column *436*, for what reasons the fishery division of the Department of Agriculture did not oppose the application under its remit under the Fishery Act 1986 in respect of its responsibility for fisheries. [31275]

Mr. Ancram: The previous answers referred to do not make mention of an application. The question cannot be answered in its present form.

"The Nemesis File"

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *801*, what conclusion was reached by the inquiry conducted by the Royal Ulster Constabulary serious crime squad. [30705]

Sir John Wheeler: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend on 14 December 1995, *Official Report* column *801*, and to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on 24 April 1996, *Official Report*, columns *182–83*. The RUC investigations into the allegations contained in this book continue.

Public Bodies (Employees)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the number of women employed in each non-departmental public body in Northern Ireland and (b) the number of non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland which have a female chair. [30494]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Name of body	*Number of women employed*
Agricultural Research Institute of NI	14
Fisheries Conservancy Board for NI	8
Foyle Fisheries Commission	4
Livestock and Meat Commission for NI	8
NI Fishery Harbour Authority	1.5
Construction Industry Training Board	49
Enterprise Ulster	23
Equal Opportunities Commission	28
Fair Employment Commission	57
General Consumer Council for NI	8
Labour Relations Agency	25
Local Enterprise Development Unit	138
Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members[1]	1
Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action[1]	1
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	104
Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd.	158
Industrial Tribunals	
NI Industrial Tribunals[2]	7
NI Fair Employment Tribunal[2]	4
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	26
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	26
Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	97
Northern Ireland Higher Education Council[3]	n/a
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	29
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	47
Ulster Museum	82
Youth Council for Northern Ireland	11
Northern Ireland Museums Council	2
Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards	4

Education and library boards (Non-teaching staff)	*Number of women employed*
Belfast	3,357
North-Eastern	5,682
South-Eastern	3,964
Southern	5,164
Western	5,693
NI Economic Council	4
NI Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee	20
Local Government Staff Commission	7
NI Housing Executive	1,396
Laganside Corporation	7
NI Transport Holding Company (including bus and rail companies)	330
Fire Authority NI	179
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	250
Council for Post-Graduate Medical Education[1]	22
Mental Health Commission[1]	5
Health and Social Services Boards	728
Health and Social Services Trusts[1]	25,114
Health and Social Services Directly Managed Units (DMUS)[2]	12,143
Health and Social Services Councils[1]	15
Central Services Agency	339
Health Promotion Agency[1]	17
Regional Medical Physics Agency	27
Blood Transfusion Services Agency	120
Police Authority for NI	2,317
Independent Commission for Police Complaints for NI	12
Probation Board for NI	213
Rathgael Training School	82
SACHR Secretariat	6

[1] These are part-time posts filled by the same person.

[2] Of the seven listed under the NI Industrial Tribunals, four are also involved in the Fair Employment Tribunal.

[3] The Council's Secretariat is employed by the Department and not the Council itself.

1. Includes NI Ambulance Trust.
2. DMUS as at 31 December 1995.

(b) The NDPB's in NI which have a female chairman are as follows:

HM Prison Magilligan
HM Prison Maghaberry
Agricultural Wages Board
Equal Opportunities Commission
General Consumer Council
NI Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members
Health and Safety Agency
Fair Employment Tribunal
Industrial Tribunals—two full-time/five part-time
Western Education and Library Board
Historic Buildings Council
Housing Benefit Review Board Panels
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Advisory Committee of the Therapeutic Professions Allied to Medicine
Central Nursing Advisory Committee
Central Personal Social Services Advisory Committee
Central Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board
Eastern Health and Social Services Council
Southern Health and Social Services Council
Health and Social Services Trusts
NI Blood Transfusion Service Agency
Child Support Appeal Tribunal 12 part-time Chairmen
Social Security Tribunal 14 part-time Chairmen
Disability Tribunal eight part-time Chairmen
Medical Tribunal four part-time Chairmen
NI Consumer Committee for Electricity

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and what cost to his Department. [30565]

Sir John Wheeler: During 1995–95 and 1994–95, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments have used detective agencies or investigators on the following occasions:

(1) serving six debt enforcement orders;

(2) gathering evidence in relation to an enforcement action against the unauthorised change of use of a property;

(3) investigating seven public or employers liability claims;

(4) investigating two industrial injury claims;

(5) work in relation to an appraisal of a project for which grant assistance had been sought;

at a total cost of £17,861.

Names of the detective agencies have not been disclosed on grounds of confidentiality and security.

Hydroelectricity

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available to the Lough Neagh and Maine System Game Anglers Association the contents of letters exchanged between a member of the fishery division of the Department of Agriculture and hydro-electric consultant of Dougal Billie Associates. [31224]

Mr. Ancram: No. Release of this information would adversely affect the Department's ability to secure the best possible fishery protection measures in water abstraction situations related to hydroelectric projects.

WALES

Forest Enterprise

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many parcels of forestry are currently being offered for sale by Forest Enterprise Wales; and if he will make a statement. [29633]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its acting chief executive, Mr. Gordon M. Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 31 May 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Wales the following question:

"how many parcels of forestry are currently being offered for sale by Forest Enterprise Wales: and if he will make a statement."

The question relates to an issue that is my responsibility, as Acting Chief Executive of Forest Enterprise, so I have been asked to respond. The information you require is as follows:-

There are currently 34 woodlands totalling 1,242 hectares being offered for sale, by Forest Enterprise Wales. As set out in the Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99 Forest Enterprise plans to sell 40,000 hectares of forest land in the next three years and expects to receive about £60 million from the sale of forest land and surplus properties during that period. Some 15 per cent of these sales will be in Wales.

Local Government Re-organisation

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local authorities which will cover all or part of each of the parliamentary constituencies which will come into existence at the end of the present Parliament. [30353]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is set out as follows:

Constituency	*Unitary Authority*
Aberavon	Neath Port Talbot
Alyn and Deeside	Flintshire
Blaenau Gwent	Blaenau Gwent
Brecon and Radnorshire	Powys
Bridgend	Bridgend (part); Vale of Glamorgan (part)
Caernarfon	Gwynedd
Caerphilly	Caerphilly
Cardiff Central	Cardiff
Cardiff North	Cardiff
Cardiff South and Penarth	Cardiff (part); Vale of Glamorgan (part)
Cardiff West	Cardiff
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr	Carmarthenshire
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire	Carmarthenshire (part); Pembrokeshire (part)
Ceredigion	Ceredigion

Constituency	Unitary Authority
Clwyd South	Wrexham (part); Powys (part); Denbighshire (part)
Clwyd West	Denbighsire (part); Conwy (part)
Conwy	Conwy (part); Gwynedd (part)
Cynon Valley	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Delyn	Flintshire
Gower	Swansea
Islwyn	Caerphilly
Llanelli	Carmarthenshire
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	Gwynedd (part); Conwy (part)
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	Merthyr Tydfil; Caerphilly (part)
Monmouth	Monmouthshire; Torfaen (part)
Montgomeryshire	Powys
Neath	Neath Port Talbot
Newport East	Monmouthshire (part); Newport (part)
Newport West	Newport
Ogmore	Bridgend (part); Rhondda Cynon Taff (part)
Pontypridd	Rhondda Cynon Taff (part); Cardiff (part)
Preseli Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire
Rhondda	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Swansea East	Swansea
Swansea West	Swansea
Torfaen	Torfaen
Vale of Clwyd	Denbighshire
Vale of Glamorgan	Vale of Glamorgan
Wrexham	Wrexham
Ynys Môn	Isle of Anglesey

Organochlorines

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has evaluated concerning production and discharge as waste of chlorinated organic compounds from industrial establishments in south Wales since 1966; and if he will make a statement. [30484]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A number of sources of information and reviews are available relating to the emission of certain chlorinated organic compounds from industrial sources. These include "The Chemical Release Inventory", first published by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in 1994, which includes detailed analyses of emissions both by local authority area and by industrial sector.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has evaluated on the level of organochlorines in the aerial environment of Cardiff as compared with other urban centres in the United Kingdom. [30485]

Mr Jones: Organochlorines in air, including dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls and pesticides, are currently monitored at three urban and four rural sites throughout the United Kingdom as part of the Department of the Environment's national air quality monitoring network. It should be noted that not all the pollutants are monitored at every site. Between January 1991 and September 1993 one site was located in Cardiff. A summary of data from these sites is presented each year in the "Digest of Environmental Statistics", copies of which have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Local Government Archives

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure that arrangements entered into between two or more authorities on archive services offer an adequate and stable framework for the delivery of services. [30690]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The details of joint arrangements are a matter for the councils concerned. In considering the draft schemes on which councils consulted him under section 60 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, my hon. Friend looked for evidence that joint arrangements would exist for a reasonable period beyond April 1996 and that adequate staffing and other resources would be provided.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether archive services are being provided at the same standards as the previous local authorities by the new unitary authorities under section 60 of the Local Government Act (Wales) 1994. [30689]

Mr. Jones: It is too early to make any such assessment. Eighteen county and county borough councils have still to send to my right hon. Friend the final versions of the schemes which they are required to prepare under section 60 of the 1994 Act.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether existing collections of archive records are being maintained intact by the new unitary authorities; and what arrangements are in place to monitor the operation of the archive schemes by the new authorities. [30691]

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend has made no such assessment. Section 60 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 imposes duties on county and county borough councils to prepare and maintain archive schemes; and, before making or modifying a scheme, to consult my right hon. Friend and to have regard to his advice.

Pharmacy Contractors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pharmacy contractors there are in each of the local authority areas of Wales. [30590]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of pharmacy contractors in each health authority area is as follows:

Area	Number
Bro Taf	190
Dyfed Powys	122
Gwent	121
Morgannwg	129
North Wales	152

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from pharmacy contractors concerning the late payment of remuneration; how many payments of remuneration have been delayed more than 120 days; and if he will make a statement. [30588]

Mr. Hague: There are no identified cases of agreed payments of salary, overtime or allowances to Welsh Office staff being delayed for more than 120 days.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will adopt to assist the cash flow problems of pharmacy contractors with regard to their need to pay their suppliers. [30589]

Mr. Hague: The present system of reimbursement is being considered as part of the 1996–97 pay negotiations for pharmacists' fees and allowances. As the negotiations are not completed, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from pharmacy contractors concerning the late payment of remuneration. [30587]

Mr. Hague: One from a pharmacy contractor, and eight from hon. Members writing on behalf of a constituent.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to retain retail price maintenance for medicines; and if he will make a statement. [30601]

Mr. Hague: The decision to review retail price maintenance for pharmacy products was made by the Office of Fair Trading. I understand that the review is looking closely at the possible effects which abolition may have on the viability of the independent pharmacy sector.

Pharmacists Review Panel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contacts he maintains with the independent pharmacists' review panel; and if he will make a statement. [30600]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office officials maintain regular contacts with the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee on matters concerning the provision of pharmaceutical services in Wales.

Ambulance NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with chief ambulance officers and the chairmen of the Welsh ambulance trusts concerning *(a)* financial viability, *(b)* revisions of boundaries *(c)* mergers and *(d)* potential efficiency savings; and if he will make a statement. [30696]

Mr. Hague: I have had no consultations with ambulance NHS trusts on border changes or mergers. All NHS trusts, including ambulance trusts, are monitored regularly by my Department to ensure financial viability. For 1996–97, I have asked health authorities to make 3 per cent. efficiency savings across Wales which will be reflected in the contracts which they strike with all trusts.

Dispensing Doctors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the level of profit made by dispensing doctors in dispensing on the NHS free samples from pharmaceutical companies; what plans he has for an abatement scheme to recover these costs; and if he will make a statement. [30694]

Mr. Hague: It is for the independent Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration to make recommendations on the level and distribution of net incomes for doctors taking part in the NHS. Among the evidence available to it each year is a comparison of the earnings and expenses of dispensing and non-dispensing doctors.

Payments to doctors in respect of practice dispensing have been subject to an abatement, known as the discount scale, since 1983. The discount scale represents the difference between the list price of all drugs dispensed in general practice and the net acquisition cost of the same drugs.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report,* column *66,* what plans he has to set up rendering capacity in Wales in conjunction with the 30-month and cull cow slaughter scheme. [30698]

Mr Hague: We are continually monitoring all aspects of the operation of the over 30-month slaughter scheme; we are actively considering a variety of options for increasing throughput of cattle under the scheme.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of *(a)* beef cattle and *(b)* dairy cattle slaughtered so far in Wales under the 30-month compensation scheme. [31115]

Mr. Hague: The total number of cattle from Wales slaughtered under this scheme at 30 May 1996 is 7,383.

No breakdown between beef cattle and dairy cattle is available.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30548]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is given in the following table:

Staff in the Welsh office by grade as at 1 April 1996

Administrative Grades	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Percentage*
Senior Civil Servants	68	53	15	22
G6	23	18	5	22
G7	146	107	39	27
SEO	118	95	23	19
HEO	293	173	120	41
EO	460	202	258	56
AO	522	142	380	73
AA	526	211	315	60
Total	2,156	1,001	1,155	54

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30564]

Mr. Hague: In 1994–95 private investigation services were used by my Department on eight occasions at a cost of approximately £670. In 1995–96 such agencies were used on three occasions at a cost of approximately £310.

Private investigation agencies have been used in cases of damage to trunk road furniture and recovery of rent. The companies are not named for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Refereeing (Insurance)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of providing all-Wales insurance cover for school staff supervising or refereeing sporting activities and how this would compare with *(a)* each local education authority providing cover for their schools and *(b)* each school taking out its own insurance policy; [30707]

(2) if he will make it his policy to insure all staff in schools when they are supervising or refereeing sporting activities. [30710]

Mr. Hague: No such estimate has been made. It is for local education authorities in respect of county and controlled schools, and the governing body in the case of voluntary-aided and grant-maintained schools, to ensure that insurance is adequate to cover staff involved with school sporting activities.

Specialist Beef Cattle

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to announce exemptions from the 30-month ban in respect of specialist beef cattle. [31080]

Mr. Hague: Comments from interested organisations were invited on 3 May on a proposal to establish a voluntary mature beef assurance scheme, which would allow cattle aged over 30 months from specialist beef herds which met the scheme's conditions to be sold for human consumption. Comments are being considered, and the next steps will be announced as soon as possible.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *65*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31227]

Mr. Hague: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the concern caused by the BSE crisis to Welsh agriculture; and what has been the cost to public funds to date of measures taken to deal with BSE. [31099]

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend and I have met the farming unions, farming delegations and others, and are well aware of their concerns. As regards the cost of Government measures introduced to deal with this crisis I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Northampton, North, (Mr. Allen) *Official Report*, columns *321-22*.

Cattle Trading

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department is taking to ensure that cattle trading in Welsh markets is not subject to *(a)* cartels and *(b)* other unfair trading practices. [31079]

Mr. Hague: The Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce is working to enable the carcases of clean beef animals over 30 months old and cull cows to be put into cold storage until rendering capacity is available to deal with them. This should help maintain a competitive market for these animals.

HEALTH

GP Fundholding

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the statutory regulation will be in place requiring former general practitioner fundholding practices to apply accumulated savings to discharge outstanding liabilities; and what have been *(a)* the number of fundholders and *(b)* the financial amounts involved prior to the introduction of this statutory regulation over the last five years. [26725]

Mr. Malone: This regulation has been in effect since 1 April 1996. One fundholding practice left the scheme with both undischarged liabilities and savings before that date. In 1995–96 the practice overspent by £148,000. By agreement with the health authority, it returned £45,000 of its £92,000 savings from earlier years, towards the overspend, with the balance being met from contingency funds.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of providing free prescriptions and optical and dental treatment to students on the ground of low income; and what proportion of those students were in full-time higher education for each year since 1990. [29040]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals he has to modify the exemption list in relation to prescription charges and the criteria for the eligibility for the list; and if he will make a statement; [30186]

(2) what proposals he has *(a)* to extend the range of medicines which are issued free of charge and *(b)* to widen the list of conditions entitling the sufferer to free prescriptions; and if he will make a statement. [30185]

Mr. Malone: We do not plan to extend the arrangements to include other groups of people, medical conditions or medicines. Our prescription charge exemption and remission arrangements are among the most generous in Europe.

Doncaster Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the running costs of *(a)* Doncaster health authority and *(b)* Doncaster family health services authority in each year since 1988. [29735]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Headquarter revenue expenditure

£ thousand

Year	*Doncaster family health services authority*	*Doncaster district health authority*
1988–89	338	1,843
1989–90	427	1,883
1990–91	719	2,082
1991–92	1,169	1,226
1992–93	1,153	1,476
1993–94	1,289	1,827
1994–95	1,376	1,996

Source:
Annual accounts of the district health authority and the family health services authority.
Notes:
1. Changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities and district health authorities mean that the figures are not strictly comparable.
2. The health authority costs are those reported in the accounts as "Authority administration and purchasing expenses". This includes capital charges after 1991–92. The family practitioner committee/family health services authority administration costs are those reported in the annual accounts as revenue administration costs and represent that part of total expenditure which is not medical, dental, ophthalmic or pharmaceutical.

AIDS and HIV

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were registered suffering from (i) AIDS and (ii) HIV, in each London borough council in December 1995. [29994]

Mr Horam: The number of men and women with AIDS reported voluntarily by clinicians to the communicable disease surveillance centre as resident in London boroughs to December 1995 is shown in the table. Similar information for diagnosed HIV infection is not available.

For reasons of confidentiality the figures are not shown separately by sex.

AIDS cases reported to PHLS AIDS centre by 31 December 1995 by local authority of residence at time of report

Authority	*Total cases*	*Known to have died*
Barnet	142	63
Hillingdon	53	36
Brent	175	99
Harrow	41	24
Ealing	232	160
Hammersmith and Fulham	523	351
Hounslow	149	109
Kensington and Chelsea	600	394
Westminster	498	316
Barking and Dagenham	14	10
Havering	17	10
Redbridge	53	36
Waltham Forest	96	58
City of London	8	7
Hackney	209	121
Newham	170	100
Tower Hamlets	197	114
Enfield	66	45
Haringey	228	137
Camden	403	220
Richmond	103	77
Islington	284	176
Bromley	47	37
Bexley	27	14
Greenwich	85	63
Lambeth	636	440
Lewisham	180	120
Southwark	311	212
Croydon	125	89
Merton	105	72
Sutton	19	18
Wandsworth	445	317
Kingston	41	26

Crohn's Disease

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of public funding into research for Crohn's disease; if he will increase this figure over the planning period; and if he will make it his policy to amend the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 to allow Crohn's sufferers to make claims for compensation. [3065]

Mr. Horam: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The council is an independent body, deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment. Although it supports a significant portfolio of research related to intestinal diseases and inflammatory bowel diseases, it does not currently fund any research specifically on Crohn's disease.

Responsibility for the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates Yorkshire regional health authority bought its premises at Park parade, Harrogate; how much was paid for the premises; and from whom they were bought. [30687]

Mr. Malone: The Yorkshire regional health authority bought its premises at Park parade, Harrogate from County Hotels (Harrogate) Limited on 31 March 1981 for a sum of £300,000.

Administration Costs

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the proportion of the budget spent on administration for *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* NHS trusts, *(c)* directly managed units, *(d)* fundholding general practitioner practices, *(e)* non-fundholding general practitioner practices and *(f)* the NHS as a whole. [30735]

Mr. Malone: The latest available information is for 1994–95 when spending on administration by regional health authorities, district health authorities, family health services authorities and special health authorities accounted for 3.5 per cent. of the national health service total gross spending. This figure includes the total revenue expenditure on pay and accommodation costs of staff at headquarter level in RHAs, DHAs and SHAs as identified in their annual accounts and the administration expenditure identified in the FHSAs' accounts.

The costs of administrative support in trusts are not separately identifiable from the 1994–95 accounts, as these were regarded as part of operational expenditure.

The costs of administrative support in directly managed units are included in the costs of the parent health authority.

All general practitioners are independent contractors supported through the general medical services system of payments and allowances. There is no facility within this system to separate out administrative costs. Fundholding practices receive a management allowance to meet the additional costs incurred in managing a fund. In 1994–95 these allowances accounted for 0.2 per cent. of NHS total gross spending.

Across the health service as a whole, 4.4 per cent. of total gross spending was committed to administration. This total includes the elements identified above as well as the gross running costs of the NHS executive and NHS-related functions of the Department of Health and the costs of the Prescription Pricing Authority and the Dental Practice Board.

Charities (NHS Budget)

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total NHS budget came from charities in each of the past five years. [30736]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve prostate cancer screening; and if he will make a statement. [30800]

Mr. Horam: We have no plans to introduce a national NHS screening programme for prostate cancer. The key aim of any screening programme must be to secure a demonstrable improvement in health by increasing length of life and enhancing quality of life. There is, as yet, no evidence that this would be achieved in relation to prostate cancer. The Department is aware of the need to assess the value of available techniques for the early detection of prostate cancer. Several research projects are currently being undertaken.

Although there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer, individual patients can be tested on request. This may be necessary where there is a family history of the disease. Some general practitioners offer patients testing as part of a general health check.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of prostate cancer have been identified in the United Kingdom in each of the past five years; what analysis he has made of these figures; and if he will make a statement. [31146]

Mr. Horam: The number of cases of prostate cancer registered in England and Wales were published in "Cancer Statistics Registrations", series MBI Nos. 19-1986, 20-1987, 21-1988 and 22-1989, and in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "Monitor" MBI 95/1-1990. Copies of all five publications are available in the Library.

Questions relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of NHS patients suffering from prostate cancer who have been treated with brachytherapy combined with external beam radiation; and if he will make a statement. [31147]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy with regard to making a prostate specific antigen test generally available at an early date to people suspected of suffering from prostate problems; and what plans he has to introduce a regular screening test for all men of vulnerable age groups. [31149]

Mr. Horam: The Department is aware of the need to assess the value of available techniques for the early detection of prostate cancer, including the prostatic specific antigen test. The Department of Health's standing group on health technology assessment has identified prostate cancer as one of the priority areas for health technology assessment and has commissioned work to assess the cost-effectiveness, clinical benefit and comparative value of measurement of PSA in serum and transrectal ultrasound in the diagnosis and management of prostatic cancer. The results of this work should be available shortly.

Although there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer available to national health service patients, individual patients can be tested on request. This may be necessary where there is a family history of the disease. Where appropriate, general practitioners can offer some patients testing as part of a general health check.

We have no plans currently to introduce a national NHS screening programme for prostate cancer. The key aim of any screening programme must be to secure a demonstrable improvement in health by increasing length of life and enhancing quality of life. There is, as yet, no evidence that this would be achieved in relation to prostate cancer.

Patient Costs

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the average patient care cost and *(b)* the number of in-patient beds in each NHS hospital trust, broken down by region. [30827]

Mr. Horam: Information on in-patient and day case costs will be placed in the Library.

Information on the number of in-patient beds is contained in the Department of Health publication "Bed Availability for England, Financial Year 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30774]

Mr. Horam: The number of registered disabled people employed by the Department, including the executive agencies, is 57. This represents 1.09 per cent. of the total number of staff.

Depressive Illness

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Depression Alliance organisation; and if he will make a statement. [30782]

Mr. Bowis: I met representatives of Depression Alliance on 20 March. Departmental officials are in regular contact with the organisation and enjoy a constructive relationship with it.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of depressive illness in the United Kingdom; and what studies are being undertaken by his Department to investigate the effectiveness of treatment. [30781]

Mr. Bowis: The national survey of psychiatric morbidity carried out in 1993, and funded by the Department of Health, includes data on the incidence of depressive illness in the United Kingdom. Copies of the documents relating to the survey are available in the Library.

Although the Department is not undertaking any studies into the effectiveness of treatment for depressive illness, the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, is funding a number of trials which examine different types of treatment and therapies in this field.

Nurses' Wages

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been allocated to Doncaster health authority in 1996–97 for the purpose of increasing nurses' wages; and what percentage change this represents over the figure for 1995–96. [30811]

Mr. Malone: There is no specific funding within health authority allocations for pay.

Children's Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken to implement the recommendations contained in its internal inquiry into the selection, development and management of staff in children's homes. [30994]

Mr. Bowis: We have conducted no internal inquiry into such matters.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places there were in residential care homes for children in *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the voluntary sector and *(c)* the private sector for each year since 1979. [30993]

Mr. Bowis: Information currently available centrally on places in children's homes was published in "Children's Homes at 31 March 1995, England, A/F 95/22", copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Prescribing Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his letter of 1 April, (1) what is the estimated timetable for having available information on the prescribing costs for 1995–96 of each of the relevant categories of general practitioner; [31200]

(2) what was the average prescribing cost expressed as net ingredient cost per patient unit in 1989–90 and 1990–91 for those categories of general practitioners who had become by 1994–95 (i) non-fundholders, (ii) first wave fundholders, (iii) second wave fundholders, (iv) third wave fundholders, (v) fourth wave fundholders and (vi) fifth wave fundholders. [31203]

Mr. Malone: Data for 1990–91 are shown in the table. Comparable data for 1989–90 are not in a format suitable for analysis. Data for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Prescribing data for general practitioners: non-fundholders and fundholders by fundholding wave

Financial year 1990–91

Net ingredient Cost per prescribing unit (£)

			1990–91 data for practices becoming fundholders in waves as indicated				
Year	*All non-FH*	*Continuing non-FH*	*1st wave*	*2nd wave*	*3rd wave*	*4th wave*	*5th wave*
1990–91	33.85	33.80	33.25	34.39	34.06	34.07	33.82

Source:

PACT data, Prescription Pricing Authority. Figures are for items prescribed by GPs in England and dispensed during the months April-March.

Notes:

1. Expenditure is quoted in net ingredient cost terms for comparison purposes. Fundholder spending is actually monitored against actual cost, after allowing for discounts and container costs.
2. The population denominator is the prescribing unit. Persons 65 and over count as three PUs, those under 65 as one. PUs are calculated using Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid-year estimates of the resident England population.

3. For technical reasons, a proportion of items and their associated net ingredient cost values have been excluded from the data. The figures are comparable with those for later years quoted in the letter of 1 April, but are not directly comparable with national drugs bill data.
4. "All non-fundholders" refers to non-fundholders in 1991, i.e. all doctors.
5. The "Continuing non-fundholders" data represent those practices which have not become fundholders in the first five waves.

Read Codes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the arrangements for fair remuneration to the NHS centre for coding and classification for licence income arising from overseas sales of Read codes material, if he will list the accrued income from each such overseas country; and if he will make a statement. [31198]

Mr. Horam: The national health service centre for coding and classification has no responsibilities for overseas use of Read codes. As a result of the negotiations to purchase the copyright of the Read codes in 1990, Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. currently has total rights to market Read codes overseas.

Overseas income during the period from March 1990 to 30 September 1995 was £220,000, against which direct expenses and company costs of £270,000 have been expended over the same period. Details of individual arrangements are commercially confidential.

In 1994, CAMS proposed, free of charge, to surrender to the Department of Health its total rights to generate income overseas and to bring overseas income within the controlled cost plus arrangements which apply to the income from NHS sources. Negotiations to amend the original contract are in hand.

NHS Accounting

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the arrangements for the joint accounting and book-keeping of the NHS centre for coding and classification and Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. [31199]

Mr. Horam: The accounting and book-keeping arrangements for the national health service centre for coding and classification are the responsibility of the NHS executive, of which the centre is a part; the arrangements for Computer Aided Medical Systems Ltd. are the responsibility of that private company. There are no joint accounting or book-keeping arrangements, but the same financial consultant overseas the accounting and book-keeping at both CAMS and NHS CCC. This arrangement is being reviewed.

Drug Addicts (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of registered drug addicts in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990. [31093]

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

All drug addicts notified to the Home Office in Coventry district health authority and West Midlands regional health authority, 1990–1994

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Coventry	95	73	76	91	101
West Midlands	670	947	1,143	1,221	1,506

Silicone Breast Implants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ban the use of silicone breast implants. [30667]

Mr. Horam: No.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tests are available in the United Kingdom to measure the extent of silicone migration in the body. [30664]

Mr. Horam: There are no validated test methods available, either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, suitable for determining the extent of silicone migration in body fluids and tissues.

Pesticide Poisoning

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to ensure that the publication "Pesticide Poisoning, Notes for the Guidance of Medical Practitioners" is made publicly available through bookshops. [31019]

Mr. Horam: "Pesticides Poisoning, Notes for the Guidance of Medical Practitioners", will be available in Her Majesty's Stationery Office bookshops from the end of June.

Resource Management Initiative

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total cost to date of the resource management initiative. [31049]

Mr. Malone: The total cost is not possible to ascertain since boundaries between the programme and normal local developments in information technology and clinical management would be impossible to define precisely and therefore to cost.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation is being undertaken of the resource management initiative. [31050]

Mr. Malone: An independent evaluation of the resource management programme in England was commissioned by the national health service executive from a consortium led by the health services management unit.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to allow general practitioners' staff to join the NHS pension scheme. [31022]

Mr. Malone: The matter is under consideration. A number of complex issues have to be resolved before a decision is reached.

Psychiatry (Children)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* whole-time equivalent child and adolescent psychiatry consultants, *(b)* clinical

psychologists working with children and *(c)* psychotherapists working with children for each year since 1979. [30991]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Information on the number of clinical psychologists working with children is not available centrally.

National health service hospital and community health services child and adolescent psychiatry consultants and child psychotherapists, excluding assistants and trainees, in England at 30 September each year 1979 to 1994

Whole-time equivalents

Year	*Child and adolescent psychiatry consultants*	*Child psychotherapists*
1979	240	60
1980	260	70
1981	280	50
1982	300	70
1983	300	60
1984	310	50
1985	320	60
1986	330	70
1987	320	80
1988	340	110
1989	330	110
1990	350	140
1991	340	160
1992	320	[1]250
1993	340	220
1994	330	220

Note:
[1] A new pay and grade system for child psychotherapists was introduced in October 1991. One of the new pay scales was identified by a code formerly used for clinical psychologists. Figures for 1992 include some clinical psychologists who cannot be identified separately.
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental and non-medical work force censuses.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to is answer of 20 May, *Official Report,* column *78,* how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31236]

Mr. Horam: None.

"A New Partnership for Care in Old Age"

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of elderly people in long-term residential and nursing care homes in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2010 who will have a partnership long-term care policy if the proposals in "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age" are implemented. [31296]

Mr. Bowis: We have no targets for the take-up of partnership products to meet long-term care costs. This will depend on the nature of the scheme and consumer choice.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost in terms of income forgone by local authorities or the Government in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2010 of a partnership long-term care insurance scheme, as proposed in the White Paper, "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age", assuming £1.50 protection for every £1 of insurance benefit was taken out by (i) 10 per cent., (ii) 25 per cent., (iii) 50 per cent., and (iv) 100 per cent., of elderly people with capital assets greater than £10,000. [31294]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 14 May, *Official Report,* column *419.* In reaching conclusions about the partnership proposals, the Government will take careful account of the cost implications, including costs falling on local authorities.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will supplement the examples given on pages 35–36 of "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age", to exemplify the cost of long-term care insurance, within and without a partnership scheme, in terms of a monthly premium and a lump sum payment for benefits worth £1,600 a month for *(a)* a single male, *(b)* a single female and *(c)* a couple aged (i) 60 and (ii) 65 years. [31295]

Mr. Bowis: We expect that premiums for long-term care insurance generally, and particularly under a partnership scheme, will fall relative to current products as the market develops. However, premiums are still likely to vary considerably according to individual circumstances.

Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the calendar years *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995 the total number of fatal suspected adverse drug reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and for each of the years if he will list the 10 drugs associated with the largest number of reported suspected fatal adverse reactions. [26291]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 April 1996]:* The information is shown in the tables.

Year	*Total number of fatal[1] reports*
1993	471
1994	408
1995	476

[1] Reports where the fatality was associated directly or indirectly with the adverse reaction.

The table provides information on the number of reports of suspected adverse drug reactions for fatal cases associated directly or indirectly with reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines by health professionals from 1993 to 1995. As the scheme is voluntary, not all adverse reactions are reported. A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug cited; other factors may have contributed. Comparisons between different drugs may be misleading because many factors influence

reporting, including the level of usage of a medicine, the length of time it has been on the market and whether there has been significant media coverage relating to its use.

The 10 drugs most frequently associated with fatal[1] suspected adverse reactions in 1993, 1994 and 1995 are listed in the table.

Drug substances most frequently associated with fatal reactions in 1993		*Drug substances most frequently associated with fatal reactions in 1994*		*Drug substances most frequently associated with fatal reactions in 1995*	
Drug substance	*Number of reports*	*Drug substance*	*Number of reports*	*Drug substance*	*Number of reports*
1 = Clozapine	32	1 = Clozapine	28	1. Clozapine	34
1 = Flosequinan[2]	32	1 = Diclofenac	28	2. Diclofenac	22
3. Virus Influenza	17	3. Fluoxetine	12	3. Ethinyloestradiol	21
4. Fluoxetine	16	4 = Cyproterone	9	4. Fluoxetine	15
5. Streptokinase	15	4 = Strepokinase	9	5 = Sertraline	12
6 = Ethinlyoestradiol	14	4 = Finasteride	9	5 = Paroxetine	12
6 = Diclofenac	14	7 = Paroxetine	7	7 = Amiodarone	10
8. Moclobemide	12	7 = Ethinyloestradiol	7	8 = Nicorandil	9
9. Cyproterone	9	9 = Virus influenza	6	8 = Ibuprofen	9
10. Methotrexate	8	9 = Amiodarone	6	10 = Thioridazine	8
		9 = Misoprostol	6	10 = Gestodene	8
		9 = Ciprofloxacin	6	10 = Levonorgestrel	8
		9 = Lithium	6	10 = Methotrexate	8

[1] Reports where the fatality was associated directly or indirectly with the adverse reaction.
[2] This product was withdrawn from the market in 1993 because of concerns regarding increased mortality associated with its use.
Some of the reports associated with the drug substances presented concern products containing multiple active ingredients.
The figures provided are for the number of suspected adverse drug reactions where the reaction began in the year specified.

Residential Care Provision

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers he has to ensure that local authority care managers offer the required level of choice to elderly people and their relatives seeking residential care. [31189]

Mr. Bowis: We have issued a statutory direction to local authorities which requires them to place a resident in a care home of his or her choice subject only to availability of a bed, appropriateness of the home to the level and type of assessed need and reasonableness of cost in relation to the range of price normally paid by the authority for the level and type of need.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy in respect of an independent inspectorate supported by private residential sector residential homes. [31269]

Mr. Bowis: A number of organisational models, including an independent inspectorate, have been put forward for consultation in our review of the regulation and inspection of social services. We shall consider possible changes to the current regulatory structure in the light of the independent assessor's report.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cut-off point of beds per home for private sector residential homes in Devon laid down by Devon social services; what is the equivalent figure for local authority homes; and what guidance he has issued on this matter. [31188]

Mr. Bowis: These are matters for the registering authority. No guidance has been issued by the Government on the maximum number of beds in residential homes.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority residential homes in Devon are neither registered nor accredited; and what action he plans to take to bring about their registration or accreditation. [31239]

Mr. Bowis: Local authority residential care homes are not currently required to register under the Registered Homes Act 1984. Authorities are however required to inspect their directly managed homes and apply the same standards as they do to independent sector homes. The possible need for local authority homes to be regulated is being considered as part of our review of the regulation and inspection of social services.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take in respect of staffing levels in local authority residential homes in Devon which fail to meet Devon council's recommendations for the private sector. [31238]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for the local authority. We require local authorities to apply the same standards, including standards on staffing levels, to directly managed homes as they do to independent sector homes.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the provision of health care of the relative costs of caring for the elderly, mentally ill patients in *(a)* a local authority-run home in Plymouth and *(b)* private sector establishments in Devon. [31240]

Mr. Bowis: No assessment has been made centrally of these relative costs.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers he has to ensure that in residential homes in Devon the purchaser/provider split takes place in accordance with the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. [31195]

Mr. Bowis: There are no such powers in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. We encourage authorities to obtain maximum value for money from their purchasing arrangements for community care services and we agree with the Audit Commission that this includes making better use of the independent sector.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the differences in the provision of respite care to *(a)* private sector homes in Devon and *(b)* the local authority's own residential homes. [31187]

Mr. Bowis: Centrally available information on adult short stay residents in residential care homes in Devon at 31 March 1995 and on short stay admissions during the year to 31 March 1995 is shown in the table.

Short-stay residents in and short-stay admissions to residential homes in Devon[1]

	Number of residents at 31 March 1995	*Percentage of all residents*	*Number of admissions in year to 31 March1995*	*Percentage of all admissions*
Local authority homes	225	61	5,860	76
Independent sector homes[2]	145	39	1,890	24
All homes	370	100	7,750	100

[1]"Short stay" includes short placement for assessment and other reasons as well as respite care.
[2]Private and voluntary sector residential care homes registered under the terms of the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each year since 1990 the total number of suspected adverse reactions to combined oral contraceptives reported via the yellow card system and the number which were fatal. [26437]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 April 1996]:* The information is shown in the table.

Suspected adverse reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1990–1995 for oral contraceptives in the United Kingdom

Year	*Total number of suspected adverse drug reaction reports where oral contraceptives are indicated as a suspect drug*	*Total number of suspected fatal[1] adverse drug reaction reports where oral contraceptives are indicated as a suspect drug*
1990	285	12
1991	215	10
1992	199	6
1993	137	14
1994	121	6
1995	232	21

[1] Reports where the fatality was associated directly or indirectly with the adverse reaction.
A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug cited.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Polly Peck

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Attorney-General what action is currently being taken by the Serious Fraud Office to investigate moneys stolen from Polly Peck plc for the purposes of political donations in the United Kingdom. [30666]

The Attorney-General: The role of the Serious Fraud Office is to investigate alleged serious or complex fraud.

Asil Nadir, formerly chairman of Polly Peck International plc, stands indicted before the central criminal court on 13 counts of theft involving over £33 million alleged to have been stolen from Polly Peck International plc. In May 1993 he absconded and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

The purposes for which moneys allegedly stolen are alleged to have been used are not directly relevant to the charges and are not the subject of current investigation by the SFO.

Amusement Machines

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received on the operation of section 34 of the Gaming Act 1968. [30805]

The Attorney-General: I have received letters from 27 Members of Parliament, including the hon. Gentleman, requesting clarification of the Crown Prosecution Service's decision to seek leave to appeal to the House of Lords for a definitive ruling about the interpretation of section 34 of the Gaming Act 1968 in the case of R *v.* Burt and Adams Ltd. the HB Leisure case.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report,* columns *56–57,* what was the size of the performance bond called in by the ODA; and what size of company it related to. [31225]

Mr. Hanley: The company had a contract partly funded by ODA, it went into receivership and the performance bond of £54,608 was called in by the overseas client.

The company no longer exists and no record of the company's size is available in ODA.

Bosnia

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received from the World Health Organisation about the use the World Health Organisation made of the £300,000 which it received from the British Government for the physical rehabilitation programme in Bosnia; how much was used for prosthetics; and in which Bosnian medical institutions. [31120]

Mr. Hanley: The World Health Organisation has provided an interim report to my Department, dated 31 May 1996. As Finland had tied its contribution to the

provision of prosthetics, WHO has chosen to use the ODA grant—originally expected to cover this area—elsewhere within its programme of co-ordinated physical rehabilitation activities. The grant will be used in 1996 to expand the programme within Bosnia (Banja Luka and Bihac), Serbia-Montenegro (western Baka), and Croatia (eastern Slavonia). The activities include training for professionals, rehabilitation, and the provision of equipment and supplies.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the British Government to work with the Bosnian Government to co-ordinate the work of voluntary and non-government organisations in Bosnia. [31121]

Mr. Hanley: We work with the Bosnian and other former Yugoslav Governments, non-government organisations and international agencies such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to identify needs and determine priorities. Because non-government organisations are independent, neither we nor the Bosnian Government are in a position to direct them, but co-ordination between and with them is achieved through practical liaison. Since 1992, the Government have provided more than £18 million for the work of voluntary, non-government organisations in former Yugoslavia.

Greenwich University

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what transfer of funds took place from the ODA to the university of Greenwich arising from the transfer of the scientific arm of the ODA to the university. [31193]

Mr. Hanley: There was no transfer of funds from ODA to Greenwich on completion of the sale agreement. There will be an adjustment to the nominal consideration paid by Greenwich based on the agreed level of net current assets at completion; this could result in a payment from the ODA to Greenwich or vice versa.

HIV-AIDS

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the United Kingdom's contribution to UN organisations has been used specifically for HIV-AIDS programmes for each year since 1991. [30227]

Mr. Hanley: Several UN systems agencies—including the World Health Organisation, UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund, UN Childrens' Fund, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, and, now, the UN AIDS programme—have, since 1991, implemented programmes that will benefit people at risk of, or affected by, HIV infection. The UK is an important contributor to all, except UNESCO. The data needed to calculate the proportion of these contributions used "specifically for HIV-AIDS programmes" are not currently available.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Commission has been used for HIV-AIDS specific activities for each year since 1991. [30226]

Mr. Hanley: Several directorates-general within the EC—including I, V, VIII and XII—have, since 1991, used funds with the specific intention of benefiting people at risk of, or affected by, HIV infection. The data needed to calculate the proportion of the UK's contribution used for these activities are not currently available.

Myanmar

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for each of the past five years, the *(a)* grant loans and *(b)* loans made available by his Department to Myanmar. [31279]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1177*. In 1990–91 and 1991–92—the years not covered by my earlier reply—UK bilateral aid to Burma amounted to £68,000 and £53,000 respectively. All UK bilateral assistance over the past five years has been on grant terms, largely for humanitarian aid.

Contraception Research

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what research projects to develop new methods of contraception were funded by the aid budget in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and for what period of time. [30459]

Mr. Hanley: None in 1994. In 1995, ODA and the Medical Research Council agreed support over a five-year period for a contraceptive development network focusing on the contraceptive effects of antigestogens for women and steriodal hormones for male contraception with the aim of developing promising new methods of contraception.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what research projects in the field of sexual and reproductive health were being funded by the aid budget in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and for what period of time. [30460]

Mr. Hanley: Twenty-three research projects were funded in 1994 and 24 in 1995. Details are as follows:

Methodologies for measuring maternal health in developing countries. April 1992–April 1995.

Hypertension and Eclampsia in Pregnancy. April 1994–March 1996.

Pelvic Inflammatory disease in slum women in Bombay. January 1993–December 1995.

Sexual awareness, life styles and related health needs of young, single female factory workers. April 1992–April 1995.

Socio-cultural determinants of induced abortion in developing countries. April 1992–April 1994.

The management of eclampsia-control trial of magnesium sulphate and diazepam to reduce maternal morbidity. June 1992–June 1995.

Reproductive Morbidity. April 1992–April 1995.

Study of induced abortion among urban poor. October 1992–October 1995.

Reproductive health beliefs among young women. June 1994–December 1994.

Impact and cost-effectiveness of focused perinatal health education for mothers on infant care, neonatal mortality and postnatal family planning practices. January 1994–January 1996.

Pilot study to explore and compare health seeking behaviour and socio-economic context in commercial sex workers and other women. May 1994–December 1994.

Menstrual health of adolescent girls. July 1994–July 1996.

Malaria and maternal anaemia—an intervention study in pregnancy. September 1994–September 1997.

The development of an appropriate approach to community based education in family planning. April 1994–1995.

Cervical cancer in developing countries. March 1993–March 1996.

Assessment of reproductive health needs of out of school adolescents. April 1992–April 1994.

HIV-AIDS study of selected economic aspects of adult illness. August 1990–March 1995.

Prevention of HIV-related tuberculosis. October 1992–October 1996.

Risk factors for mother-to-infant transmission of HIV-1. October 1993–December 1995.

Investigation of early diagnosis of HIV in children. April 1994–March 1996.

The Informal Economy of Health: Management of STDs and Paediatric Crisis by Women. November 1992–March 1996.

Collaborative study on effectiveness of HIV-AIDS work in developing countries by non-governmental organisation. November 1993–March 1996.

New tools for prioritising and evaluating safe motherhood programmes. December 1994–October 1996.

The social factors influencing the high rates of Caesarian section births. October 1995–February 1997.

Acceptability of barrier methods as a means to prevent reproductive tract infection. October 1995–October 1998.

A rational package of antenatal care: economic evaluation alongside a multi-centre randomised controlled trial. November 1995–November 1996.

Delivering cost-effective antenatal care in low and middle income countries. November 1995–February 1996.

Increasing the efficiency of antenatal care in identifying and referring women needing institutional deliveries. December 1995–December 1996.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Special Needs

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list by local education authority the ratio of staff employed in a special educational needs capacity to pupils receiving special needs education; [30403]

(2) if she will list by local education authority the ratio of teaching assistants to qualified teaching staff employed in a special educational needs capacity. [30401]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to introduce further incentives in the near future to encourage firms to employ an increased percentage of disabled workers. [30351]

Mr Paice: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will provide an effective legal framework for improving access to jobs, and participation in all aspects of work, for disabled people. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment intends to commence the employment provisions of the Act around the end of the year. Together with the practical schemes and services that the Government provide through the Employment Service and training and enterprise councils both for disabled people and for their employers, this will help to ensure that disabled people can make increased use of the available opportunities.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many registered disabled people are employed by her Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30776]

Mr Paice: The number of registered disabled staff employed by the Department, including its agencies, was 1,597 at 1 April 1996. This was 3.69 per cent. of the total number of staff employed by the Department.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent research she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated regarding the educational attainments of ethnic minorities. [30448]

Mrs. Gillan: The Secretary of State has commissioned research studies which provide data on educational qualifications and labour market experiences of ethnic minority groups. These are:

(i) The youth cohort study.

(ii) The fourth national survey of ethnic minorities.

This and other relevant research brought to the Department's attention is reviewed as results become available.

Consultants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the contracts for consultancy work between *(a)* her Department and *(b)* training and enterprise councils and (i) Millbank Consultants Ltd., (ii) Paddington Consultancy Partnership Ltd., (iii) Mr. Neale Coleman, (iv) Mr. Stephen Hilditch and (v) Mr. Peter Bradley; and if she will indicate the total fees paid to (i) to (v). [30660]

Mr. Robin Squire: According to existing databases, the Department has not entered into any contracts with the consultants as named, either in its own right or in conjunction with any training and enterprise council. TECs are private companies and are not required to inform the Department of contracts that they enter into in their own right.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in her Department on 1 April. [30559]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the number of full-time equivalent staff at 1 April 1996, including the Employment Service and the Teachers' Pensions Agency.

Grade, including equivalents	*Men*	*Women*	*Total number of staff*	*Women as a percentage of total staff*
Permanent Secretary	1	0	1	0
Director-General	5	0	5	0
Director	20	0	20	0
Divisional Manager	96	30	126	23.8
Grade 6	46	14	60	23.3
Grade 7	493	175	668	26.2
SEO	570	323	893	36.2
HEO	1,538	1,319	2,857	46.2
EO	4,176	8,188	12,364	66.2
AO	5,817	16,047	21,860	73.4
AA	494	979	1470	66.5
Total	13,256	27,071	40,324	67.1

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what use her Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; which agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to her Department. [30574]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment made no use of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95.

Careers Service

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *600*, what arrangements are in place for ensuring that the objectivity and impartiality of the careers service will be delivered; and what will be the involvement of *(a)* schools, *(b)* employers, *(c)* pupils and *(d)* parents. [31041]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave on 17 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *599* and *600*. The arrangements described there for quality assuring and inspecting careers services involve seeking the views of schools, employers, pupils and parents as appropriate. The arrangements are set out in the "Requirements and Guidance for Providers", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer 17 May, *Official Report*, column *599*, what steps were taken to replace the input of the inspector with the possible conflict of interest; and what terms and conditions of service apply to his successor. [31045]

Mr. Paice: There is no longer a specific careers inspector post; therefore, the inspector has not been replaced.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the funding provided to the careers service will be protected and enhanced in areas where there is increased population; and how the targets set for the service reflect the needs of individuals. [31043]

Mr. Paice: Funding for careers service work is allocated to Government offices based on the number of young people in each region. Government offices then have the flexibility to negotiate funding with individual careers services, taking into account the number of young people in the area and other relevant local circumstances.

The targets agreed with each careers service include group advice sessions, individual interviews and action plans for young people. These targets reflect the key purpose of the careers service which is to provide objective advice that enables young people to make appropriate choices.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column 600, what plans her Department has to ensure that the careers service will cater for the needs of adults not in full–time education or part-time vocational education; and what is the timetable for the integration of adult guidance services with the careers service. [31042]

Mr. Paice: There are no plans to expand the existing statutory careers service client group. However, the consultation document on lifetime learning published in December 1995 highlights the importance of guidance. The Government will be responding to the consultation shortly.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *599*, if local education authorities' partners in the new careers service are companies; and what is their strategic operational role in the delivery of careers services. [31044]

Mr. Paice: The majority of new careers service companies have training and enterprise councils and local education authorities as major partners. A minority of careers service providers are other types of company with a major interest in guidance training and education. Additionally, the prospectus inviting bids to provide a careers service seeks clear proposals from bidders for achieving and maintaining the confidence, trust and support of key customers and stakeholders, including LEAs. The Secretary of State's "Requirements and Guidance for Providers" states that careers services must be able to demonstrate responsiveness to local community needs, including clients, local employers, local authorities, and education and training providers.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many foreign nationals have been given awards under the assisted places scheme. [30989]

Mrs. Gillan: Information about the nationality of children holding assisted places is not collected centrally. The number of foreign nationals is likely to be small. To be eligible for an assisted place, a child must have been ordinarily resident in the British Islands or, if a national of a country in the European Economic Area and a child of a migrant worker, in an EEA country, for two calendar years before taking up the place, unless of a refugee granted exceptional leave to enter or remain in the British Islands.

Benefits

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics the Employment Service is required to keep on decisions relating to persons suspended from benefit for not actively seeking work. [31254]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Clive Soley, dated 4 June 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about what statistics the Employment Service Agency is required to keep on decisions relating to persons suspended from benefit for not actively seeking work.

The actively seeking employment condition was introduced in the 1989 Social Security Act. Information on the number of decisions and disallowances issued to Unemployment Benefit claimants, including those in respect of the definition of actively seeking work, is contained in the quarterly summary entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", copies of which are held in the Library of the House. This information is available from 1 October 1989, when the actively seeking work condition was introduced, to the quarter ending March 1996.

Decisions to disallow Income Support claims because of failure to satisfy the actively seeking work condition are given by Adjudication Officers in the Benefits Agency of the Department of Social Security. Therefore, we do not hold information about the number of these disallowances.

I hope this is helpful.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what steps her Department is taking to ensure that additional resources allocated to reducing disruptive behaviour in schools will address the problems of excluded children from ethnic minorities; [31082]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of ethnic minority children among those excluded from school; [31071]

(3) what plans her Department has to discuss with the Commission for Racial Equality the proportion of children from ethnic minorities among those excluded from school; [31072]

(4) what action her Department plans to take based on the data available to it regarding the number of ethnic minority children among those excluded from school. [31073]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's guidance on exclusions, which was issued to all schools in May 1994, emphasises that disciplinary procedures should be applied objectively and consistently across all cultural groups and reminds head teachers that failure to do so could constitute unlawful racial discrimination under the Race Relations Act 1976.

The aim of reducing the number of ethnic minority pupils who are excluded is an important element in a number of the projects the Department is supporting under our 18 million programme of grants over the next three years to help schools tackle behaviour and discipline problems.

This Department is currently analysing data collected from schools on permanent exclusions in the 1994–95 school year, including, for the first time, information on the ethnic origin of permanently excluded pupils. Aggregate data will be available in the early autumn. My right hon. Friend will consider whether action needs to be taken in the light of that information and consultations with interested bodies.

Vandalism

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the annual cost of vandalism in the Bolton area, in each of the last 10 years; of that what amount can be attributed to arson; how many incidents of arson there have been in each year; and if he will make a statement. [31160]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not held centrally.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *11*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by her Department in the last five years. [31234]

Mr. Robin Squire: According to existing databases the Department has required one performance bond *(b)* and one parent company guarantee *(c)*.

Computers in Schools

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to promote an increase in the availability of computers in schools before the next general election. [31057]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department is continuing to promote the availability of computers in schools through its programme of grants for education support and training and by other means.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what schemes have been put in place since 1992 to ensure that each child *(a)* has had access to a computer and *(b)* is computer literate by the time he or she leaves school. [31059]

Mr. Squire: The Department has continued to support the development of pupils' information technology skills in a number of ways. These include the establishment of IT as a separate subject within the national curriculum; the programme of grants for education support and training which supports the purchase of computer

hardware, software and teacher training in IT; and support for the work of the National Council for Educational Technology.

Internet

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what schemes she has established to promote access to the Internet in schools. [31058]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government published in November 1995 their statement of policy on the development of networked communications in education. "Superhighways for Education: The Way Forward", a copy of which is in the Library, identifies the national priorities and sets out the action to which the Government are committed. This includes support and encouragement for the piloting of new communications technologies in education, and ensuring that advice on the use of these technologies is made available through appropriate bodies. The paper announced an innovative programme of pilot projects, including several piloting the use of the Internet, which the Department is evaluating. The Department is also supporting two parallel projects. One will evaluate the benefit of educational Internet services; the other will assess the development of a virtual languages centre on the Internet. Advice and guidance for schools on networking and the use of the Internet is available from the National Council for Educational Technology.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Visits

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to public funds of the visit by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to Innerleithen, Tweeddale, on 26 April; what was the purpose of the visit; and what is the policy of Scottish Office Ministers in respect of notifying right hon. and hon. Members of visits to their constituencies. [28063]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for industry and local government visited Peebles and Innerleithen in the right hon. Member's constituency on 25 April, not 26 April. He visited Clough Mill Ltd., Waverley Mills, Innerleithen with the chairman of Scottish Borders Enterprise as one of a number of engagements in the area. The cost of this element of the day's programme cannot be separately identified. My hon. Friend wrote to the right hon. Member on 26 March, as is the normal practice, to inform him that he would be carrying out ministerial engagements in his constituency; this particular engagement was added to the original programme at a late stage.

Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings outside trust premises have been held between private companies tendering for the support services at the Victoria infirmary in Glasgow and staff who work for the Victoria infirmary trust; if the trust board was informed of such meetings; and what action the board has taken about them. [30132]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The question concerns specific operational matters on which the chief executive of the trust is best placed to provide answers. Accordingly the hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Small for details.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what opportunity was available to staff at the Victoria infirmary in Glasgow to make an in-house bid for the support services recently put out to competitive tender; if he will list those in attendance at the meeting where staff were informed of that opportunity; and if he will place in the Library *(a)* a copy of the minutes of the meeting and *(b)* all correspondence between the trust board and those private companies which indicated an interest in tendering for the services. [30131]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: I understand from the Victoria Infirmary NHS trust that, in addition to placing an advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, a number of open meetings were held with staff to announce the trust's intention to invite tenders for specific contracts and to confirm that there was a potential for making an in-house bid. No record of staff who attended these open meetings was made, nor were minutes or notes taken. Correspondence between the trust and the private organisations expressing interest in this tender exercise is a matter of commercial confidence.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30121]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: For the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1996, the activities listed below have been reviewed under my competing for quality programme. Market testing is one of three main outcomes from competing for quality reviews. The others—strategic contracting out and internal restructuring—are also listed.

Activity	*Outcome*
Scottish Prison Service	
Capital building	Strategic Contracting Out: on a project basis
Central store	Market Test: won in-house
Maintenance and minor works (phase 1) at four establishments	Market Test: three won in-house and one to an external contractor
Maintenance and minor works (phase 2) at six establishments	Market Test: all won in-house
Maintenance and minor works (phase 3) at remaining nine establishments	Strategic Contracting Out
Education services	Market Test: won by various contractors
Historic Scotland	
Monument conservation unit	Internal restructuring
Gardeners at Holyrood palace and park	Market Test: won in-house
HQ office support staff	Internal restructuring
Patrolmen at Edinburgh castle	Strategic Contracting Out
Scottish Agricultural and Science Agency	
Animal house	Market Test: won by external contractor
Security	Market Test: won by external contractor

Activity	Outcome
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	
Marine surveillance	Internal restructuring
Internal audit	Strategic Contracting Out
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	
Information technology	Strategic Contracting Out
Messengers	Market Test: won in-house
Registers of Scotland	
Messengers/telephonist services	Market Test: won in-house
Reprographic services	Market Test: won in-house
Typing/proof reading	Market Test: won in-house
Workflow functions	Market Test: won in-house
Scottish Court Service	
Capital works programme	Strategic Contracting Out
Estate management services	Strategic Contracting Out
Managing agents services: north, west and east regions	Strategic Contracting Out
Security	Strategic Contracting Out
Cleaning	Strategic Contracting Out
Catering	Strategic Contracting Out
Payroll services	Strategic Contracting Out
IT hardware and software support	Strategic Contracting Out
Scottish Record Office	
Cleaning	Market Test: won in-house
Reprographics	Market Test: won in-house

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 April, *Official Report*, column *158*, what were the electorates of each of the existing parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, as at 16 February. [30238]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	Electorate
Aberdeen, North	48,667
Aberdeen, South	60,829
Angus, East	64,826
Argyll and Bute	49,869
Ayr	67,485
Banff and Buchan	67,105
Caithness and Sutherland	31,346
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	55,404
Central Fife	57,674
Clackmannan	50,405
Clydebank and Milngavie	48,581
Clydesdale	63,338
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,112
Cunninghame, North	56,137
Cunninghame, South	49,961
Dumbarton	56,858
Dumfries	61,697
Dundee, East	57,550
Dundee, West	56,629
Dunfermline, East	52,147
Dunfermline, West	52,764
East Kilbride	66,796
East Lothian	69,171
Eastwood	65,508
Edinburgh, Central	59,826
Edinburgh, East	46,137
Edinburgh, Leith	57,679
Edinburgh, Pentlands	56,476
Edinburgh, South	63,286
Edinburgh, West	59,394
Falkirk, East	52,364
Falkirk, West	49,628
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	54,942
Glasgow, Cathcart	43,418
Glasgow, Central	48,975
Glasgow, Garscadden	40,726
Glasgow, Govan	43,873
Glasgow, Hillhead	59,784
Glasgow, Maryhill	48,491
Glasgow, Pollok	44,433
Glasgow, Provan	34,501
Glasgow, Rutherglen	51,764
Glasgow, Shettleston	51,680
Glasgow, Springburn	45,098
Gordon	85,435
Greenock and Port Glasgow	50,377
Hamilton	62,846
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	72,918
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,359
Kincardine and Deeside	70,308
Kirkcaldy	53,507
Linlithgow	63,299
Livingston	64,204
Midlothian	60,978
Monklands, East	48,849
Monklands, West	49,881
Moray	65,216
Motherwell, North	58,129
Motherwell, South	49,904
North-East Fife	58,495
North Tayside	58,447
Orkney and Shetland	32,635
Paisley, North	47,105
Paisley, South	48,402
Perth and Kinross	68,317
Renfrew, West and Inverclyde	60,995
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	58,626
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	44,371
Stirling	59,979
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	62,038
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	40,910
Western Isles	23,208

Retex

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make dependency on textiles a deciding factor when calculating levels of additional resources under the EU RETEX initiative; and if he will make special provision for the borders region. [30673]

Mr. Kynoch: Textile dependency as set out in article 6 of the Commission's guidelines as decided on 13 May 1992 (Official Journal number C 142, 4 June 1992), already determines eligibility for funding under RETEX, and additional resources will be allocated between UK eligible areas, including border region, on the same basis as the original allocation.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) males and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30550]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of male and female staff in each of the principal and administrative grades, and the percentage of these that are women are shown in the table.

Staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April 1996 selected groups of staff—full-time equivalents

A. Unified grades

Grade[1]	Scottish office			Historic Scotland			Scottish fisheries protection agency		
	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female
SCS	119.8	19.6	14.1	2.7	—	—	1.0	—	—
G6	57.0	11.0	16.2	5.0	—	—	2.0	—	—
G7	239.6	64.7	21.3	17.0	5.4	24.0	2.0	—	—
Sub total	416.4	95.3	18.6	24.7	5.4	17.9	5.0	—	—

Grade[1]	Scottish Agriculture Science Agency			Scottish Office Pensions Agency			Student's Awards Agency for Scotland		
	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female
SCS	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	1.0	—	—
G6	2.0	—	—	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
G7	10.0	1.6	14.2	3.0	—	—	—	—	—
Sub total	13.0	1.6	11.0	4.0	—	—	1.0	—	—

[1] Professional and administrative staff at Scottish Civil Service grades and grades 6 and 7 are not identified separately on returns to Treasury.

B. Main grades within administration group

Grade[1]	Scottish Office Core			Historic Scotland			Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency		
	Male	Female	Percentage female	Male	Female	Percentage female	Male	Female	Percentage female
SEO	100.4	26.2	20.7	4.0	—	—	3.0	—	—
HEO	285.8	156.2	35.3	14.0	2.0	12.5	4.0	—	—
EO	194.6	236.2	54.8	8.0	17.0	68.0	5.0	1.0	16.7
AO	210.9	371.2	63.8	13.5	27.3	66.9	7.0	1.0	12.5
AA	159.0	285.2	64.2	12.0	16.5	57.9	3.0	18.3	85.9
Sub total	950.7	1075.0	53.1	51.5	62.8	54.9	22.0	20.3	48.0

Grade[1]	Scottish Agriculture Science Agency			Scottish Office Pensions Agency			Student's Awards Agency for Scotland		
	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female	Male	Female	Percentage Female
SEO	1.0			2.0			2.0	1.0	33.3
HEO		0.6	100.0	11.0	3.0	21.4	5.0	1.6	24.3
EO		1.0	100.0	17.0	15.1	47.1	9.0	10.6	54.1
AO		4.1	100.0	32.0	36.5	53.3	30.0	40.6	57.5
AA	5.0	2.0	28.6	25.0	13.0	34.2	7.0	8.0	53.3
Sub total	6.0	7.7	56.2	87.0	67.6	43.7	53.0	61.8	53.8

[1] This is for main administration grades and as such excludes professional staff below grade 7, industrial grades and other administrative grades such as typing, secretarial and support grades.

Inverclyde Enterprise Zone

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs have been created as a result of the establishment of the Inverclyde enterprise zone; in which industries such employment has been found; what is the sex ratio of the employed; and if he will make a statement. [30175]

Mr. Kynoch: As at 31 March 1995, 2,245 jobs had been created within the Inverclyde enterprise zone. Of these, 1,669 were in manufacturing industry and the remaining 576 in other activities ranging from construction work to catering. Information is not available to distinguish between male and female employment.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many designated sites of the Inverclyde enterprise zone are still awaiting industrial development; and if he will make a statement. [30176]

Mr. Kynoch: Four of the 13 designated sites within the Inverclyde enterprise zone do not, at present, have any enterprise zone activity.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the companies which have established industrial and commercial units in the designated sites of the Inverclyde enterprise zone; how many full-time employees they have recruited since commencing business in the zone; and if he will make a statement. [30177]

Mr. Kynoch: The table contains the names of companies and details of the sites in which they were located within the enterprise zone as at September 1994, the most recent date for which this information is available. Monitoring information compiled for the Department of Environment indicates that, by March 1995, 33 industrial and commercial establishments,

employing a total of 2,245 people, were located on designated enterprise zone sites. No information is available on the number of full-time employees recruited since these companies commenced business in the zone.

Companies and organisations located in Inverclyde enterprise zone, September 1994

Name	*Site*
East End Bakery	Kingston
Ian's Grill	Kingston
Anaplast	Kingston
Madison Cable	Kingston
Viking Life Saving Equipment	Kingston
Accurate Armour	Kingston
S and A Seafoods	Kingston
Fairway Leisure	Kingston
The Sign Factory	Kingston
T R Shellfish	Kingston
W H M Maintenance Supplies	Kingston
Xtraz	Kingston
Brands Electronics	Kingston
Minebea	Kelburn
Blair Joinery	Ingleton
Cigna Employee Benefits	Cartsburn
HCS Global	Cartsburn
Bathroom Elegance	Cartsburn
JCS Training	Cartsburn
Royal Mail	Cartsburn
Drummond Packaging	Larkfield
Mimtec	Faulds Park

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to modify the regulations governing the designation of sites in the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement. [30178]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has no plans to modify the regulations governing the designation of sites in the Inverclyde enterprise zone.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Inverclyde enterprise zone is due to cease to exist; what proposals he has to extend its existence; and if he will make a statement. [30179]

Mr. Kynoch: Inverclyde enterprise zone will cease to exist on 2 March 1999 after 10 years of enterprise zone designation. My right hon. Friend has no plans to extend its existence.

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the demolition or retention of the Gourock ropeworks of Port Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [30180]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations regarding the Gourock ropeworks. An application for listed building consent to demolish the building has been received by Historic Scotland and is under consideration. A decision on whether my right hon. Friend will call the application in for his own determination will be taken soon.

Greenock Sheriff Court

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the total cost of the renovation of the Greenock sheriff court; and if he will make a statement; [30182]

(2) on how many occasions proceedings at the Greenock sheriff court have been postponed in the past two years; what were the reasons for such postponements; and if he will make a statement; [30183]

(3) what has been the total cost of remedial work carried out to the structure, heating system, water supply and other facilities and services at the Greenock sheriff court following its re-opening on the completion of the renovation programme; and if he will make a statement. [30184]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total cost of the renovation of Greenock sheriff court, including the temporary outhousing of the court while work was proceeding, was £4,032,000, inclusive of professional fees and VAT. The work involved rot eradication, stonework repairs and extensive internal refurbishment. Subsequent to the renovation, parts of the external drainage system were replaced at an inclusive cost of £56,500.

The courthouse was reopened on 8 August 1994. On two occasions during the winter of 1995, business was adjourned at 10am following difficulties with the heating system. On 3 and 9 May 1996, business was adjourned at 10am and on 13 May 1996 business was adjourned at noon; each of these adjournments was a result of problems with the incoming water main. On each occasion, the courthouse was open for business the next working day.

The causes of the problems experienced at the court and the allocation of costs for remedial action are still the subject of discussion between the Scottish Court Service and its contractors and consultants.

Fixed Penalties

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many charges of breach of the peace have been dealt with by way of fixed penalty by the procurator fiscal at Kilmarnock in the past 12 months; and how many of these have involved criminal injuries. [31068]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am advised by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that, during the period from 1 May 1995 to 23 May 1996, the procurator fiscal at Kilmarnock issued 198 fixed penalty notices in respect of charges of breach of the peace. The procurator fiscal does not have information available to him to indicate how many, if any, of such cases resulted in awards by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Agency. As to whether personal injury was involved in any of the cases, this information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In general, it is unusual for a breach of the peace charge to involve personal injury to any party.

Computerised Tomography Scanners

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hospitals that have CT scanners; and if he will make a statement. [31157]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 28 CT scanners in the following NHS hospitals in Scotland:

Hospitals	*CT Scanner*
Aberdeen royal infirmary	2
Western infirmary, Glasgow	1
Glasgow royal infirmary	1
Royal infirmary, Edinburgh	2
Ninewells	1
Western general, Edinburgh	1
Southern general	2
Stobhill, Glasgow	1
Raigmore, Inverness	1
Crosshouse hospital	1
St. John's at Howden	1
Royal Alexandra hospital	1
Victoria infirmary, Glasgow	1
Queen Margaret hospital	1
Royal hospital for sick children, Yorkhill	1
Law, Carluke	1
Dundee royal infirmary	1
Stirling royal infirmary	1
Perth royal infirmary	1
Falkirk royal infirmary	1
Hairmyres, East Kilbride	1
Monklands hospital	1
Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary	1
The Ayr hospital	1
Inverclyde royal hospital	1

Information on CT scanners in independent sector hospitals is not available centrally.

Sheriffs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average cost saving achieved per day through the use of a temporary instead of a full-time permanent sheriff in Scotland. [25470]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 April 1996]:* Temporary sheriffs provide cover for the absences of permanent sheriffs and more generally offer a useful element of flexibility in the handling of court business.

Temporary sheriffs are paid a daily rate of £282 plus travel and subsistence expenses. The daily rate for a permanent sheriff, based on working 220 days per annum is £345.

Information Directorate

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost to date of media monitoring carried out on behalf of the information directorate; and if he will make a statement. [25489]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 April 1996]:* The contract for media monitoring was awarded on the basis of a competitive tendering exercise. The actual cost of the contract is a matter of commercial confidence.

Animal Foodstuffs

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current means of ensuring prohibited foodstuffs are kept out of the foodchain; what assessment he has made of their effectiveness; and what criteria he adopts to assess their effectiveness. [29914]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* It is a statutory requirement that cattle organs prohibited from human consumption—those which could potentially contain the BSE agent (the head including the brain but not the tongue, the spinal chord, spleen, thymus, tonsils and intestine)—are removed from carcases in the abattoir and stained with a distinctive dye. Such material is then rendered and disposed of at licensed landfill sites. Compliance with this requirement is supervised by the Meat Hygiene Service, an executive agency of the Great Britain agriculture Departments. The State Veterinary Service monitors the effectiveness of those operations on a regular basis to ensure that the statutory controls are being complied with.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the test for mammalian feed in animal foodstuff will be made available for public analyst services and protective services departments of local authorities. [29916]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* The ELISA test used for the detection of mammalian protein in animal feed is currently not available for use in other laboratories. The purification process for the preparation of samples prior to test has been patented and is available. For the immunological test, however, because of the difficulties experienced with validation and the limited stocks of antisera currently available, it is not possible to make the test more widely available. Nevertheless, materials can be submitted to MAFF for testing at the one veterinary investigation centre that is currently equipped to carry out the test, subject to available capacity.

Commercially available ELISA kits were tested with a view to assisting other laboratories to introduce testing, but these proved not to be sufficiently consistent in sensitivity, specifically for use for statutory purposes.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what trials have been conducted by his Department regarding the test for mammalian feed in animal foodstuff; and when these trials began. [29915]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* During validation of the test on samples collected on farms in Great Britain by the State Veterinary Service, a total of 1,577 samples were analysed between June 1994 and January 1996.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes and additions to the list of chairpersons and non-executive directors of NHS trusts in Scotland have occurred since 25 January 1993 and what are the current levels of annual remuneration. [27049]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 May 1996]:* The information requested by the hon. Member has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

ENVIRONMENT

Landlords

9. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage small landlords. [29780]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Bill includes provisions to encourage landlords into the private lettings market.

Standard Spending Assessments

15. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about the current year's standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement. [29786]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have received a number of representations from local authorities and their associations. Proposals for change are examined with the local authority associations.

Packaging Waste

16. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Government's proposals under the European directive on packaging waste. [29787]

Mr. Clappison: Shortly.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the provision of a conscience clause in the draft regulations, now being prepared by his Department, under the Environment Act 1995, concerning the shared legal obligations and recovery in recycling of packaging waste; and if he will make a statement. [30646]

Mr. Clappison: I and colleagues are fully aware of concerns that the regulations which we are presently preparing on producer responsibility for packaging waste should not compel businesses to join a scheme if, for whatever reason, they do not wish to do so. I can offer a full reassurance on this matter. There will be two routes for businesses obliged under the regulations to discharge their obligation. They will be free to discharge it alone, or by joining a collective scheme. One of the central provisions of the enabling legislation was that the individual route should be a valid option for an individual business and this will be fully reflected in the regulations. This should become clear when the draft regulations are issued for consultation.

Water (London)

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State of the Environment if he will make a statement about water supplies in London. [29789]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Most of London receives its public water supplies from Thames Water, although some of the outer London boroughs are supplied by Three Valleys Water, Essex and Suffolk Water, Sutton and East Surrey Water or North Surrey Water. The quality of the public water supply is very high. The Environment Agency's recent report to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, published on 1 May, states that water resource problems are not expected in the Thames Water and North Surrey Water areas this summer, whatever the weather. In the other companies' areas, no restrictions are anticipated given a normal summer although hosepipe and inessential use bans may possibly become necessary in parts of these areas if the summer is very hot and dry.

"This Common Inheritance"

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures he proposes to introduce over the next year by way of advancing the objectives set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance". [29790]

Mr. Clappison: We published the latest "This Common Inheritance" annual report on 26 March. This sets out what we propose to do over the next year to meet our objectives for sustainable development and the environment. Copies of the report were placed in the Library.

Water Pollution

20. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding water pollution. [29791]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received representations on various aspects of water pollution, including in respect of the very considerable improvements in the quality of our rivers that have been achieved in recent years.

Local Government Finance

21. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to give councils the powers to set their own spending limits. [29792]

Sir Paul Beresford: We will soon begin to consider the details of the next year's local government finance settlement, including capping. Once we have reached decisions on the local government settlement for next year, they will be announced in the normal way.

Elderly Person's Accommodation

22. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the support he makes available for local authorities to upgrade facilities for elderly persons' accommodation. [29794]

Mr. Clappison: Local authority housing investment programme allocations total over £1.2 billion for 1996–97. Local authorities also use resources from revenue and useable capital receipts for capital expenditure on housing. In 1995–96, this totalled £1.1 billion. It is up to local authorities to use these resources efficiently and effectively to address their local housing needs, including those of the elderly.

Council Tax

24. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authority expenditure is met by the council tax in *(a)* Hyndburn borough council and *(b)* Westminster city council. [29796]

Sir Paul Beresford: The proportion of local authority expenditure funded by council tax depends largely on where an authority sets it budget in relation to its standard spending assessment.

Hyndburn borough council has set a budget in 1996–97 which is 28.4 per cent. above its SSA, so the proportion of expenditure funded by council tax is 41.5 per cent. while Westminster city council has set a budget which is 12.7 per cent. below its SSA, so its proportion is 14.2 per cent.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authority expenditure council tax constitutes in *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* Westminster. [30535]

Sir Paul Beresford: The proportion of local authority expenditure funded by council tax depends largely on where an authority sets its budget in relation to its standard spending assessment.

Nottingham city council has set a budget in 1996–97 which is 10.9 per cent. above its SSA, so the proportion of expenditure funded by council tax is 28.7 per cent., while Westminster city council has set a budget which is 12.7 per cent. below its SSA, so its proportion is 14.2 per cent.

Planning Appeals

26. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has received from planning authorities to his new proposals for planning appeals; and if he will make a statement. [29798]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Responses to the Department's recent draft circular on planning appeal procedures have been received from the main local authority associations in England and from nine local planning authorities. Responses have also been received from around 80 other organisations.

Noisy Neighbour Prosecutions

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how may *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful noisy neighbour prosecutions have been brought in (i) the London borough of Ealing and (ii) other London boroughs in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [30662]

Mr. Clappison: Comprehensive details are not available. The tables set out the readily available information:

(1) 1991–92 to 1993–94 (based on responses to surveys by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and information from the London borough of Ealing)

Year	Number of London boroughs	Number of prosecutions[1,4] (of which are Ealing)	Number of convictions[1,4] (of which are Ealing)
1991–92	18	113(11)	93(11)
1992–93	20	106(13)	101(12)
1993–94	18	154(24)	131(22)

(2) 1994–95 to 1995–96 (based on information from the London Borough of Ealing)

Year	Number of prosecutions[1,4]	Number of convictions[1,4]
1994–95	13[2]	10[2]
1995–96	25[3]	24[3]

[1] Prosecutions and convictions under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relating to noise from domestic premises.

[2] A further three successful prosecutions were brought under section 23 of the London Local Authorities Act 1991 relating to domestic intruder alarms.

[3] A further six successful prosecutions were brought under section 23 of the London Local Authorities Act 1991 relating to domestic intruder alarms.

[4] Some prosecutions and convictions may relate to complaints in previous years.

Air Pollution

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new proposals he has to reduce air pollution. [29795]

Mr. Clappison: The Government will be publishing a consultation draft of a national air quality strategy this summer, as required by the Environment Act 1995. It will include air quality standards and objectives, and set out the measures required to meet those objectives.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30563]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Tree Planting

25. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to continue and expand initiatives to encourage tree planting in towns and the countryside. [29797]

Mr. Clappison: In the recent White Paper, "Rural England", we said that the Government would like to see a doubling of the woodland in England over the next half century. To this end we support directly the national forest in the east midlands and the 12 community forests. In addition to the £35 million the Forestry Commission will provide in forestry grants this year, Government-funded regeneration grants and agri-environment schemes can also support tree planting. My Department has spent over £1 million since 1992 on research into more cost effective tree planting and management methods.

In 1995 my Department established the national urban forestry unit to promote good practice in the planting and management of trees and woodlands in urban areas. The unit will work in partnership with local authorities, groundwork trusts, English Partnerships and other public, private and voluntary sector interests. Urban forestry will be an important element of the greening the city initiative which I launched last October. This initiative is drawing together information, experience and expertise on the greening of our towns and cities and we will make this available as a good practice guide, to be launched at a

national conference in the autumn. We are also assisting local authorities to develop tree strategies for their areas and to encourage the planting of trees when land is developed.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30547]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department as at 1 April 1996:

All disciplines

Grade	*Female*	*Per cent.*	*Male*	*Per cent.*	*Total*
Questions (a) i, (a) ii and (b)					
Grade 1	0	0	1	100	1
Grade 2	3	60	2	40	5
Grade 3	3	12	23	88	26
Grade 4	0	0	5	100	5
Grade 5	22	19	94	81	116
Grade 6	28	10	253	90	281
Grade 7	135	24	434	76	569
SEO and equivalents	113	23	383	77	496
HEO and equivalents	270	35	503	65	773
EO and equivalents	409	45	495	55	904
AO and equivalents	689	63	404	37	1,093
AA and equivalents	318	65	174	35	492
Total	1,990	42	2,771	58	4,761
Question (c) administrative staff only					
Grade 1	0	0	1	100	1
Grade 2	2	50	2	50	4
Grade 3	2	10	18	90	20
Grade 4	0	0	1	100	1
Grade 5	13	16	68	84	81
Grade 6	3	13	20	87	23
Grade 7	85	28	215	72	300
SEO	44	20	174	80	218
HEO	216	36	389	64	605
EO	341	45	414	55	755
AO	486	56	380	44	866
AA	139	55	112	45	251
Total	1,331	43	1,794	57	3,125

Consultants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* contracts with and *(b)* work carried out for (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies, (iii) development corporations and (iv) housing action trusts by (1) Paddington Consultancy Partnership Ltd. or its directors, (2) Millbank Consultants, (3) Mr. Neale Coleman, (4) Mr. Stephen Hilditch and (5) Mr. Peter Bradley; and if he will indicate the total fees paid to (1) to (5). [30661]

Sir Paul Beresford: Stonebridge housing action trust currently has a contract with Paddington Consultancy Partnership Ltd. to advise on the market test of its housing management function and to assist with the tender process. The contract was tendered competitively and is worth £42,350 including VAT.

Right to Buy

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings have been bought under *(a)* the right-to-buy and *(b)* the rent-to-mortgage schemes; and if he will make a statement. [30042]

Mr. Clappison: Between the introduction of right-to-buy legislation in October 1980 and the end of December 1995, local authorities and new towns in England reported total sales under RTB of 1.25 million homes. In the same period, housing associations reported right-to-buy sales of 28,000.

Between the introduction of the rent-to-mortgage scheme in October 1993, and the end of December 1995, there have been 16 completed sales.

Water Leakages

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the domestic water supply was lost in leakage and what was the shortfall in supply last year; and what estimate he has made of the shortages in summer 1996. [29777]

Mr. Clappison: Leakage figures for the year 1995–96 are not yet available. For 1994–95 about 30 per cent. of the water put into the domestic supply system was lost due to leakage, including leakages from customers' supply pipes.

There were no supply cuts last year despite one of the hottest and driest summers for over 200 years. The Environment Agency has confirmed in its recent report to my right hon. Friend on the water resource and supply situation for this summer, that, although there is no room for complacency, the measures water companies are taking should be sufficient to enable essential supplies to be maintained in all areas even through a hot, dry summer.

Highways Maintenance, Lincolnshire

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consultations he had with those delivering services and those involved in taking the decision to award the contract before ordering Lincolnshire county council to re-tender its highways maintenance contract; [30581]

(2) what assessment he has made of the recommendations by Touche Ross in respect of the tendering of the highways maintenance contract by Lincolnshire county council. [30582]

Sir Paul Beresford: Following a complaint from the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, officials of the Department undertook an investigation of the way in which Lincolnshire county council decided to carry out highways maintenance work. In considering the authority's response to a notice served on it, my right hon. Friend took account of the authority's possible externalisation of the work, but decided to give a direction as it appeared to him that the authority had acted anti-competitively. Since then, officials have met officers of the authority, and discussed externalisation plans, including the Touche Ross report. The authority has been told that when its externalisation plans are firm, the Secretary of State will consider any request it might make to carry the direction so that it does not cut across those plans. Ministers and officials have regular meetings with the FCEC to discuss the ability of the private sector to undertake highway work.

Repossessions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to collate figures on repossession by region. [30757]

Mr. Clappison: The Government do not collect figures on repossessions. These figures are collected by the Council of Mortgage Lenders and are not available by region.

Fisheries Service

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responsibility his Department has for the funding of the fisheries service. [31007]

Mr. Clappison: None.

House Prices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average house price in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and if he will express the figures (i) as a percentage change on the previous year and (ii) as a percentage change on 1990. [30754]

Mr. Clappison: Figures for the west midlands region are as follows:

	Average house price			*Mix adjusted house price index*	
	Average price £	*Annual percentage change*	*Percentage change on 1990*	*Annual percentage change*	*Percentage change on 1990*
1990	54,700	10	n/a	2	n/a
1991	58,500	7	7	0	0
1992	57,900	–1	6	–3	–3
1993	58,300	1	7	–1	–4
1994	59,100	1	8	1	–4
1995	60,500	2	11	–1	–4

Source:
Department of the Environment, Survey of Mortgage Lenders (5 per cent. sample of mortgage completions).

The figures in the first three columns of the table show changes in the prices of a sample of properties sold in each year without adjustment for changes in the mix of properties sold. The Department's mix adjusted house price index included in the fourth and fifth columns overcomes this limitation.

Reliable figures of average house prices for Coventry are unavailable.

House Building, Lancaster

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what body is responsible for determining the Lancaster target of 8,300 new homes in the period 1991 to 1996 as set out in the Lancashire structure plan. [30794]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Lancashire county council is responsible for preparing the Lancashire structure plan. Lancaster city council was involved in the wide consultation process which took place.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are homeless in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands. [30755]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities in England report to my Department, on their quarterly P1E return, the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985.

The latest estimate for the west midlands appears in table 2 of "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act 1985: England. Statistics for the fourth quarter of 1995".

The latest reported figure for Coventry appears in the associated supplementary table.

House Sales

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many house sales there were in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and if he will express the figures (i) as a percentage change on the previous year and (ii) as a percentage change on 1990. [30756]

Mr. Clappison: Information for the west midlands region is as follows:

	Number of residential transactions	*Annual percentage charge*	*Percentage change on 1990*
1990	125,000	–13	n/a
1991	119,000	–5	–5
1992	91,000	–24	–27
1993	97,000	7	–22
1994	109,000	12	–13
1995[1]	98,000	–10	–22

[1] Provisional.
Source:
Inland Revenue Survey of Property Transactions.

Reliable information on the number of house sales in Coventry is not available centrally.

Educational Needs Funding

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the decision was made to ignore the change in income support claimants since 1994–95 in respect of the additional educational needs index weighting within the education standard spending assessment for 1996–97; and if he will list for each local education authority the effect on the funding for additional educational needs if the change in income support claimants since 1994–95 had been taken into account. [30810]

Sir Paul Beresford: Final decisions on the distribution of standard spending assessments for 1996–97 were taken during January this year, following consultation with the local authority associations and the consideration of representations from local authorities.

The table shows the effect on the education block of SSAs of using numbers of income support claimants since 1994–95 in place of the numbers actually used in SSAs for 1996–97.

	1996–97 Education SSA £ million	*Change £ million*	*Percentage*
City of London	0.759	0.000	0.0
Camden	78.312	1.147	1.5
Greenwich	114.263	1.357	1.2
Hackney	92.084	1.624	1.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	56.047	0.733	1.3
Islington	81.095	1.281	1.6
Kensington and Chelsea	34.193	0.299	0.9
Lambeth	100.826	1.687	1.7
Lewisham	108.942	1.410	1.3
Southwark	109.297	1.830	1.7
Tower Hamlets	122.839	2.599	2.1
Wandsworth	86.304	0.808	0.9
Westminster	58.134	0.630	1.1
Barking and Dagenham	69.879	0.413	0.6
Barnet	117.029	0.268	0.2
Bexley	88.646	–0.157	–0.2
Brent	109.692	1.492	1.4
Bromley	103.845	–0.389	–0.4
Croydon	118.396	0.493	0.4
Ealing	112.151	0.912	0.8
Enfield	117.827	0.664	0.6
Haringey	93.427	1.567	1.7
Harrow	72.990	–0.007	0.0
Havering	87.183	–0.314	–0.4
Hillingdon	93.797	0.133	0.1
Hounslow	94.807	0.689	0.7
Kingston upon Thames	47.066	–0.099	–0.2
Merton	58.096	0.089	0.2
Newham	130.381	2.118	1.6
Redbridge	98.258	0.351	0.4
Richmond upon Thames	45.854	–0.316	–0.7
Sutton	67.782	–0.016	0.0
Waltham Forest	97.421	1.129	1.2
Birmingham	448.721	4.720	1.1
Coventry	119.872	0.663	0.6
Dudley	104.158	–0.292	–0.3
Sandwell	118.096	0.643	0.5
Solihull	73.069	–0.348	–0.5
Walsall	108.588	0.331	0.3
Wolverhampton	99.898	0.721	0.7
Knowsley	73.138	0.897	1.2
Liverpool	209.232	2.527	1.2
St. Helens	66.604	0.005	0.0
Sefton	106.847	0.128	0.1
Wirral	132.298	0.645	0.5
Bolton	100.891	0.078	0.1
Bury	61.635	–0.184	–0.3
Manchester	188.261	2.938	1.6
Oldham	94.759	0.241	0.3
Rochdale	82.736	0.265	0.3
Salford	82.496	0.413	0.5
Stockport	89.804	–0.478	–0.5
Tameside	80.591	–0.217	–0.3
Trafford	76.735	–0.155	–0.2
Wigan	110.133	–0.292	–0.3
Barnsley	76.867	–0.059	–0.1
Doncaster	119.680	0.205	0.2
Rotherham	102.425	0.123	0.1
Sheffield	170.970	0.397	0.2
Bradford	209.868	1.217	0.6
Calderdale	77.167	0.106	0.1
Kirklees	141.523	–0.095	–0.1
Leeds	252.509	–0.036	0.0
Wakefield	111.605	–0.262	–0.2
Gateshead	70.844	0.246	0.3
Newcastle upon Tyne	99.652	0.764	0.8
North Tyneside	68.757	0.057	0.1
South Tyneside	59.030	0.191	0.3
Sunderland	114.863	0.296	0.3
Isles of Scilly	1.233	–0.012	–0.9
Bedfordshire	220.156	–0.207	–0.1
Berkshire	282.308	–1.009	–0.4
Buckinghamshire	252.855	–1.155	–0.5
Cambridgeshire	237.278	–1.042	–0.4
Cheshire	348.970	–1.392	–0.4
Cornwall	164.930	–0.704	–0.4
Cumbria	170.602	–0.919	–0.5

	1996–97 Education SSA £ million	Change £ million	Change Percentage
Derbyshire	319.922	–1.328	–0.4
Devon	345.862	–1.070	–0.3
Dorset	207.427	–0.850	–0.4
Durham	216.644	–0.219	–0.1
East Sussex	219.761	–0.378	–0.2
Essex	566.981	–1.994	–0.4
Gloucestershire	183.797	–1.014	–0.6
Hampshire	525.153	–2.700	–0.5
Hereford and Worcester	229.005	–1.404	–0.6
Hertfordshire	387.245	–1.663	–0.4
Isle of Wight Council	45.138	–0.099	–0.2
Kent	581.733	–1.431	–0.2
Lancashire	510.448	–0.766	–0.1
Leicestershire	333.840	–0.588	–0.2
Lincolnshire	213.026	–1.197	–0.6
Norfolk	243.384	–1.242	–0.5
Northamptonshire	222.270	–0.815	–0.4
Northumberland	113.513	–0.571	–0.5
Nottinghamshire	365.135	0.017	0.0
Oxfordshire	192.571	–1.340	–0.7
Shropshire	145.332	–0.830	–0.6
Somerset	150.908	–1.093	–0.7
Staffordshire	366.019	–1.826	–0.5
Suffolk	217.470	–1.476	–0.7
Surrey	307.474	–2.515	–0.8
Warwickshire	164.025	–0.951	–0.6
West Sussex	235.410	–1.285	–0.5
Wiltshire	197.517	–1.304	–0.7
Bath and North East Somerset	54.404	–0.230	–0.4
City of Bristol	119.870	0.386	0.3
North Somerset	58.642	–0.416	–0.7
South Gloucestershire	78.677	–0.547	–0.7
Hartlepool	37.013	0.102	0.3
Middlesbrough	61.491	0.452	0.7
Redcar and Cleveland	59.590	0.174	0.3
Stockton on Tees	71.747	0.008	0.0
City of Kingston upon Hull	102.701	0.659	0.6
East Riding of Yorkshire	102.954	–0.928	–0.9
North East Lincolnshire	64.840	0.045	0.1
North Lincolnshire	56.381	–0.301	–0.5
North Yorkshire	185.854	–1.603	–0.9
York	52.793	–0.250	–0.5
Inner London	1043.096	15.404	1.5
Outer London	1824.526	9.019	0.5
Mets	4304.322	16.400	0.4
Shires	9484.108	–38.362	–0.4
New LEAs	1106.956	–2.449	–0.2
Isles of Scilly	1.233	–0.012	–0.9
England	17.764.242	0.000	0.0

Copies of both are in the Library.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30771]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department currently employs a total of 91 disabled people of whom 60 are registered and 31 are non-registered. This constitutes 2 per cent. of the total number of staff employed in the Department and its agencies.

Gloucestershire County Council

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the debt figure for Gloucestershire county council for each of the last 10 years. [30799]

Mr. Paul Beresford: The information for Gloucestershire county council is as follows:

Outstanding debt at end of financial year[1]

	£ million
1985–86	45.9
1986–87	53.4
1987–88	66.8
1988–89	92.4
1989–90	104.4
1990–91	121.1
1991–92	124.5
1992–93	129.9
1993–94	136.3
1994–95	150.8

Sources:
[1] 1983-90 CIPFA Capital Expenditure and Debt Financing Statistics, 1990-95 Total external debt, borrowing and lending surveys and PWLB.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, columns *44–45*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31230]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Alport Dale

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding Forest Enterprise's proposals for Alport dale in the Peak District national park. [31158]

Mr. Clappison: We have received 11 representations concerning Forest Enterprise's harvesting and replanting proposals for Alport dale, including one petition.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will intervene to prevent the extension of forestry plantation in Alport dale in the Peak District national park. [31159]

Mr. Clappison: I understand there are no plans to extend the woodlands at Alport dale.

Water Additives

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the

drinking water inspectorate on the addition of aluminium sulphate to remove discolouration from drinking water supplies. [31137]

Mr. Clappison: The drinking water inspectorate has made no reports about the use of aluminium sulphate in drinking water treatment.

Aluminium compounds have long been established in most parts of the world as coagulants in water treatment and their use is considered unobjectional on health grounds.

Smoke Control

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many fuels are now authorised to be burnt in smoke-controlled areas. [31107]

Mr. Clappison: There are currently 47 fuels authorised for use in smoke control areas by the Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) Regulations 1991 and by subsequent amendments.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to deregulate smoke control legislation. [31104]

Mr. Clappison: As announced in "Cutting Red Tape" in January 1994, the Government intend to repeal certain sections of the Clean Air Act 1993, including section 4 which enables local authorities to approve the design and installation of industrial furnaces in order to ensure smokeless operation. These are no longer necessary in light of changes in fuel use and the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many fuels currently on the market cannot be burnt in smoke controlled areas. [31105]

Mr. Clappison: The Department does not maintain a list of all such fuels. The use of a fuel, other than one authorised by the Secretary of State in the Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) Regulations 1991 and subsequent amendments, may constitute an offence under the Clean Air Act 1993. Some unauthorised fuel, such as coal and wood, may be used in smoke control areas when burnt in fireplaces exempted by order of the Secretary of State.

Waste Management, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authority will be responsible for all aspects of waste management after unitary status is granted to Plymouth. [31101]

Mr. Clappison: Once a shire district has become a unitary authority, it is both waste collection authority and waste disposal authority for its area. Waste regulation, however, is not a local authority function; instead it is exercised by the Environment Agency.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about local government auditors in Lancashire. [29773]

Mr. Curry: I have had no such representations, although we receive representations about a range of audit issues in Lancashire, as in other parts of the country.

Song Birds

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he is carrying out into song bird conservation and sparrowhawk predation; and if he will make a statement. [31194]

Mr. Clappison: The nature conservation agencies are participating in a number of studies and action plans related to the conservation of a variety of song bird, and other, species. Contracts with the British Trust for Ornithology support the breeding bird survey, common bird census, nest record card system, and the constant effort ringing scheme—which assesses annual productivity and survival. No specific work is presently being funded into predation by sparrowhawks. Earlier studies have indicated that this is not a significant factor causing decline in national song bird populations.

Fluoroaceteamid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further research has been undertaken since 24 October 1995 into the use of the pesticide fluoroaceteamid on farming land in Kent in 1963 and the subsequent removal of contaminated soil from the farm. [29484]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* None.

Concessionary Travel

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost of complying with the Atkins *v.* Wrekin district council and Department of Transport decision by the advocate general of the European Court of Justice *(a)* in the current financial year, *(b)* in future years and *(c)* for each year between 1984 and 1995. [30134]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I refer to the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 16 May, *Official Report*, columns *571–72*.

TRANSPORT

Concessionary Travel

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to amend the London Regional Transport Act 1984 and Transport Act 1985 to include men aged 60 years or over as a further eligible class of person for transport concessions following the Atkins *v.* Wrekin district council and Department of Transport case considered by the European Court. [30026]

Mr. Norris: I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 10 May, *Official Report,* column *275*.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) in what circumstances men aged 60 to 65 years since December 1984 will be able to claim compensation from their local authority as a result of the Atkins *v.* Wrekin district council and Department of Transport case considered by the European Court; [30025]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of complying with the Atkins *v.* Wrekin district council and Department of Transport case decision by the advocate general of the European Court of Justice *(a)* in the current financial year, *(b)* in future years and *(c)* for each year between 1984 and 1995. [30134]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

I refer to the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 16 May, *Official Report* columns *571–72*.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost to public funds in 1995 of treating oil pollution at coastal resorts. [30205]

Mr. Norris: No costs were incurred by central Government in 1995 on the treatment of oil pollution at coastal resorts. Information on local authority expenditure on oil pollution response activities is not collected centrally.

Airworthiness

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice in relation to airworthiness safety is provided by the Civil Aviation Authority to the Jamaican Government. [30492]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority contract with the Government of Jamaica lists the general airworthiness matters on which it shall advise in a two-page technical appendix. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Heavy Vehicle Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those vehicles exempt from goods vehicle operator licensing regulations and the reasons for exemption. [30471]

Mr. Norris: The classes of vehicle for which a heavy goods vehicle operator licence is not required are listed in schedule 3 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995.

There is a variety of reasons for the exemptions but, generally, it is either because the vehicles are not widely used on public roads and are not therefore a significant road safety hazard, or because they do not carry goods commercially. We are currently carrying out a review of these exemptions.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the total income generated by *(a)* the heavy goods vehicle operator licensing fee, *(b)* the public service vehicle operator licensing fee and *(c)* bus registration fees. [30461]

Mr. Norris: The figures are:

Year	*HGV operator licencing*	*PSV operator licensing*	*Bus registration*
1991–92	14,588,537	2,819,169	673,826
1992–93	15,424,930	2,561,242	633,550
1993–94	19,093,817	5,487,195	668,594
1994–95	21,442,222	3,855,768	779,667
1995–96	26,751,672	4,834,615	720,712

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce legislation relating to the impounding of illegally operated vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [30489]

Mr. Norris: We are currently considering possible schemes for the impounding of illegally operated heavy goods vehicles.

Traffic Area Offices

Mrs Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the total running cost budgets for *(a)* the Vehicle Inspectorate's enforcement activities and *(b)* the traffic area office network. [30462]

Mr. Norris: *(a)* The budgets agreed with the Vehicle Inspectorate for its enforcement activity in respect of heavy goods and public service vehicle were as follows:

Total HGV and PSV traffic and roadworthiness enforcement budgets including operator licence support work

Year	*£ million*
1991–92	13.492
1992–93	13.651
1993–94	13.230
1994–95	13.109
1995–96	13.344

(b) The traffic area network running costs budgets were:

	£ million
1991–92	11.360
1992–93	12.385
1993–94	13.045
1994–95	11.754
1995–96	11.125

Roadside Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by police force area the number of roadside checks undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate which have had to be cancelled over the last 12 months due to lack of police resources. [30490]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 4 June 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on the number of roadside checks cancelled due to lack of police resources.

The information requested was not collected prior to 1 October 1995.

However, out of a total of 2113 roadchecks carried out, the number cancelled by police during the period 1 October 1995 to 31 March 1996—by police force area—was as follows:

	Number of roadchecks
Staffordshire	3
Kent	14
Lincolnshire	5
West Yorkshire	3
South Yorkshire	1
North Yorkshire	3
Devon and Cornwall	3
Dorset	1
Thames Valley	7
Sussex	3
Surrey	4
Metropolitan	2
Essex	1
Cumbria	3
Cheshire	2
Northumbria	1
Merseyside	1
Dyfed Powys	1
West Mercia	2
Cambridgeshire	1
Transport	1
Other forces	nil

Large Goods Vehicle Licences (Exemptions)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the reasons for the prohibition of people with diabetes subject to insulin treatment from holding a large goods vehicle driver's licence. [30538]

Mr. Norris: The prohibition is based on authoritative medical advice about the risk of a hypoglycaemic attack, which may occur suddenly and unpredictably and can cause loss of consciousness. A significant proportion of collapses at the wheel have been found to be associated with insulin treatment.

M1

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when was the last time the central reservation and verges of the M1 in Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire were cleaned; and what is the programme for cleaning and collecting rubbish from motorways. [30682]

Mr. Watts: The central reservation and verges of the M1 in Northamptonshire were last cleaned at the junctions and service areas, these being the areas suffering most from litter, in the first week of April 1996. In Hertfordshire, the grassed sections of the central reservation were last cleaned during the winter programme which started in November 1995 and finished in March 1996; the hardened central reservation between junctions 8 and 10 was last cleaned in March; and the verges were cleaned approximately two months ago.

Cleaning and collecting rubbish on motorways is undertaken as part of the Highways Agency's routine maintenance programme which, in respect of grassed central reservations, includes gully and drain clearing, grass cutting, safety inspection, litter picking and other detailed inspections. In respect of hardened central reservation, it involves sweeping, cleaning, channel and gully clearing and detailed inspections. For verges, it involves sweeping the hard shoulder and litter picking.

The level of funding available for routine maintenance this year has been reduced and all activities have been carefully reviewed to maintain downward pressure on costs. Activities such as cleaning and collecting rubbish are being limited to the minimum necessary for safety.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to widen the M1 from junction 1 to the Luton-Dunstable exit. [30681]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister for Railways and Roads has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary question about plans to widen the M1 from Junction 1 to the Luton/Dunstable exit.

Proposals to widen the motorway between Junctions 6A and 10 were the subject of a public inquiry towards the end of last year. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport are currently considering their decision and will make an announcement in due course.

The junction serving Luton and Dunstable forms part of the widening scheme between Junctions 10 and 15. This scheme was identified in the recent programme review as having potential for smaller scale improvement. We are currently reviewing the scheme, for which statutory proposals were published in November 1994, with a view to meeting the overall objective of the scheme at a reduced cost. In the meantime the published proposals remain on the table but the proposed public inquiry has been suspended. We expect an announcement later this financial year on the outcome of the scheme review and the way forward.

There are no plans to widen the M1 from Junction 1 to where it joins the M25 (Junction 6A).

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; which agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30570]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport and its agencies have used detective agencies: Appointed through the Treasury Solicitor's Department, in connection with seeking evidence for possible legal proceedings against trespassers on road construction sites and for processing legal documents.

1994–95: 344,217

1995–96: 477,774

To establish the whereabouts of people believed to have caused damage to the Highways Agency's roads and structures for the purpose of making claims against them. Approximately 300 to 400 cases are pursed each year at an average cost of £50 to £100 each.

To assist in the recovery of overpayments of salary to Department of Transport staff.

1994–96: four cases, total cost £190

1995–96: nil cases

To hand serve summonses for unlicensed vehicle use and to carry out a debt collection trial, in unlicensed vehicle use cases, to recover outstanding out of court settlements.

1994–95: £373,206

1995–96: £133,953

To obtain evidence in a personal injury case.

1994–95: £5,000

1995–96: nil

The names of some of the agencies involved are not available because they are not employed direct, however the following are some of the agencies that have been used:

Brays Detective Agency

Abro Watson Ltd.

Deputron

Subscription Services Ltd.

Swift Credit Services

Disc Services

Drakes Group

R. D. Denman Ltd.

L and C Group Services

Debt Managers (Scotland Ltd.)

Financial Collection Agencies (UK) Ltd.

East of England Trade Protection Society

Legal and Trade Collection Ltd.

C. Sharp Investigations and Security Consultants

M25 (Noise Data Errors)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the reasons for the errors in the noise data presented in the non-technical summary of the environmental statement for the proposed widening of the M25 motorway between junctions 12 and 15; how many *(a)* of the original leaflets were issued, *(b)* letters were issued explaining the mistake and *(c)* of the corrected, environmental effect leaflets issued; what was the cost in each case; and if every objector to the scheme will receive a copy of the corrected leaflet. [30539]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister for Railways and Roads has asked me to reply to your recent question about the errors in the noise data recently published in the Environmental Statement for our proposals to widen the M25 between Junctions 12 and 15.

The non-technical summary (NTS) of the Environmental Statement containing the incorrect noise information was issued to approximately 17,000 people and we sent them all a letter explaining and correcting the error. Our consultants delivered 4,500 of these letters on 9 and 10 May to people living close to the motorway. The remaining 12,500 were sent by post. The reason for the errors was an inputting mistake by our consultants into the computerised noise model for the scheme.

We also made copies of the amended NTS available to everyone who attended the exhibitions held between 10 and 22 May. We have placed copies at 13 deposit points and will send a copy to anyone who requests one. The final costs for correcting the errors have yet to be determined but they will all be met by our consultants. I am sorry if this mistake caused any confusion or inconvenience to anyone with an interest in the proposals, but we took the earliest opportunity to ensure the correct information was available.

Light Dues

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which types of vessel are obliged to pay light dues and which are not in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Spain, *(d)* Greece and *(e)* Germany. [30576]

Mr. Norris: Some other European countries charge light dues, but details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In the UK, commercial vessels and pleasure craft over 20 tons and tugs and fishing vessels over 10m in length pay light dues. Full details of all liabilities and exemptions are contained in the light dues regulations.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his policy in respect of light dues on fishing vessels; and what changes he is evaluating; [30575]

(2) if he will make a statement on the rationale for the light dues system; [30577]

(3) for what reason fishing vessels are obliged to pay light dues. [30578]

Mr. Norris: The Government support the user pays principle and have concluded that the costs of navigation aids to shipping are a proper charge on those who use the services. It would not be acceptable to transfer the costs to the general taxpayer. Fishing vessels make use of all types of navigation aids, so they should contribute to the operating costs. Light dues are reviewed on a regular basis, but we are not currently considering any changes to the charges levied on fishing vessels.

Ramsgate Harbour Access Road

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he had received the inspectors' report on the public inquiry held into the compulsory purchase orders and side road orders related to the Ramsgate harbour access road. [31037]

Mr. Norris: We still await the report.

Rail Freight Terminal (Central Lancashire)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to bring forward the development of an international rail freight terminal in central Lancashire. [31021]

Mr. Watts: None. This is a matter for the private sector.

Decca Navigator System

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Decca Navigator radio-navigational system. [30597]

Mr. Norris: We are currently awaiting formal recommendations from the general lighthouse authorities regarding the future of the Decca Navigator system.

No decisions have yet been made.

Driving Licences

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *134*, relating to plastic photocard driving licences, who carried out the preliminary and subsequent

public consultations; how many members of the public were consulted on each occasion; and how many *(a)* supported and *(b)* opposed plastic photocard driving licences. [31135]

Mr. Norris: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency conducted both consultation exercises.

In the preliminary exercise, 150 consultation documents were issued to organisation representing motorists and interested organisations. Forty-four written responses were received, of which 38 were in favour of proposals to include photographs on driving licences.

In the subsequent exercise, some 1,500 consultation document were issued. There were 49 written responses, of which 46 support photocard licences.

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now allow the grandfather rights of current public service vehicle and heavy goods vehicle licence holders to continue until retirement. [30798]

Mr. Norris: Following my right hon. Friend's announcement on 25 April, *Official Report*, column *248*, that implementation of certain provisions of the second EC directive on driving licences is to be deferred until 1 January 1997, we are giving consideration to the precise arrangements to be introduced in respect of eyesight requirements for driving lorries and buses.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30769]

Mr. Norris: The number of registered disabled people in my Department is 143, which is 1.2 per cent. of the total number of staff.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report*, column *150*, if he will make an announcement on the total costs of the Railtrack flotation including the amounts paid to consultants. [31260]

Mr. Watts: The costs to the Government of the Railtrack share offer are estimated to be as follows:

	£ million
Advisers fees and expenses	9.4
Marketing (including prospectus production and distribution)	4.9
Receiving bank and share shops	1.3
Overseas costs	2.1
Commissions	24.8
Total (UK and overseas offer)	42.5

These costs represent some 2.2 per cent. of the estimated total proceeds due from the sale of shares. The costs exclude stamp duty and VAT on services provided to the Government, which are not net costs to the Exchequer. There will be some further expenditure in respect of the instalment collection and the issue of bonus shares.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 15 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *675*, by what date his Department has requested that the costs awarded to it should be paid. [19836]

Mrs. Browning: The matter is being pursued by the usual legal means.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions have been brought, or are pending, in respect of animals rejected as unfit to travel prior to export in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994, *(d)* 1995 and *(e)* the four months of 1996. [30722]

Mrs. Browning: This information could be collected centrally from the local authorities only at a disproportionate cost.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *412*, when the temporary derogations expire for the 160 slaughterhouses yet to meet the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene Inspection) Regulations 1992. [27875]

Mrs. Browning: Under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, which replaced the 1992 Regulations, the temporary derogations expired on 31 December 1995 for 136 slaughterhouses. The remaining 24 premises were granted extensions to their temporary derogations of between one and 12 months.

Surplus Calves

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what methods are used to slaughter surplus calves seven to 10 days old; and what checks are made to ensure that these methods are humane. [30245]

Mrs. Browning: The welfare of calves at slaughter is protected by the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 731). The permitted methods of slaughter are stunning, by use of a captive bolt, concussion stunner or by electronarcosis—electrical stunning—which must be followed, without delay, by bleeding or pithing. The regulations lay down specific requirements for these operations. Slaughter of surplus calves under the calf processing aid scheme must take place in a licensed slaughterhouse registered under the scheme and under the supervision of the Meat Hygiene Service. An official veterinary surgeon must be at the premises when calves are handled.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the latest statistics available to him of the number of steers infected by BSE in England and Wales. [25576]

Mrs. Browning: Since 1986 and up to 2 May 1996, the number of steers confirmed as suffering from BSE in England and Wales is 21.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the incidence of BSE in other member states of the European Union. [27876]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 29 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *408*.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of BSE there have been in the United Kingdom and in each other European Union country in each year since the disease was first recognised; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the differences in incidence. [29246]

Mrs. Browning: The following number of BSE cases have been recorded in the United Kingdom and other European countries in each year since the disease was first recognised.

The reason for the difference in incidence is the exposure of cattle in the United Kingdom to infected animal feed which in exported form may have been a factor in some of the countries reporting cases in indigenous animals.

Summary of BSE cases in UK and other European countries as at 10 May 1996

Country	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Denmark[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
France	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	3	3	8
Germany[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0	15	14	17	18	16	19	16	9
Italy[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Portugal	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	12	14	5
Switzerland	0	0	0	0	1	9	15	28	64	69	28
United Kingdom	7	439	2,228	7,230	14,394	25,358	37,238	35,119	24,455	14,323	1,832

[1] Cases recorded all in cattle imported from UK. With the exception of the UK and Swiss figures, all figures are based on figures reported to the OIE which may not always be accurate. Statistics given for European countries other than UK should be used as guide only.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure prompt payment of claims for compensation from cattle head deboners who had stocks of meat in store at the time when the ban on cattle head products for human consumption was announced. [31136]

Mr. Baldry: Cattle head deboners whose businesses are licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 can apply for financial assistance under the beef stocks transfer scheme which is operated by the Intervention Board executive agency on behalf of the agriculture Departments. The IBEA aims to make payments under this scheme as soon as possible, and in any case within 28 days of the receipt of the necessary verification documentation.

Market Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of his Department's agencies, what market testing has been carried out into the services they provide and what were the results. [30114]

Mr. Boswell: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Meat Hygiene Service will reply to the hon. Member through agency chief executive letters. The information for the Department's other agencies is as follows:

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS)

ADAS has market tested document creation services, banking services, welfare services and debt recovery services. Contracts have been awarded to private sector firms. ADAS is currently market testing insurance services and has short-listed four brokers. In the normal course of its business ADAS procures a wide range of local and central services from the private sector including, for example, office cleaning, maintenance, security and legal services.

Central Science Laboratory (CSL)

Whilst the scientific services provided by CSL have been subject to market testing by the core-Department, CSL has not market tested any of its scientific work with a view to contracting out. In terms of non-scientific work, CSL has not carried out any strategic market testing as such. However, the agency is relocating to a new purpose-built laboratory near York in the late summer and services such as catering, operation of the day nursery and facilities management for the site will all be contracted out and bids are currently being evaluated.

Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD)

The directorate market tested a part of its residue monitoring work and awarded a three year contract to a private contractor starting in 1995–96. This was a pilot exercise which if successful would lead to further work being market tested. The successful contractor decided after the first year to withdraw from the contract for commercial reasons. This work and the further work will be market tested in 1996–97.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA)

The services of the VLA have been subject to one market test. This was in the area of analysis of samples collected under the national surveillance scheme for the presence of veterinary residues in meat. The work is conducted for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. This market test was won by the in-house team at the VLA following competition with the private section.

Letter from John FitzGerald to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996.

In the absence of the Chief Executive on business, the Minister has asked me to reply on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to your question about the market testing of services provided by his Department's Agencies.(30114)

The VMD is responsible for the issue of marketing authorisations for veterinary medicines, for controls on their manufacture and distribution, for post authorisation surveillance of suspected adverse reactions to veterinary medicines and for the provision and implementation of policy advice to Ministers. The Agency is also responsible for the statutory and non-statutory surveillance for residues in meat and other animal products.

The analytical work undertaken as part of the statutory National Surveillance Scheme for residues in meat has been market tested and a contract was awarded to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, with an annual cost saving of almost 12 per cent.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 June 1996.

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the market testing of services has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency.(30114)

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was launched on 1 April 1995 as an Executive Agency of MAFF. It took over from local authorities responsibility for the enforcement of the hygiene and welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales. The Government decision to set up the MHS was taken to meet the long-standing requests of a majority of representative organisations in the meat industry, who has criticised the uneven standards and varying costs of the service operated by local authorities.

In the first year of its operation the MHS created the Hygiene Advice Team (HAT) project to visit and assess animal welfare conditions in all licensed slaughterhouses and hygiene in all fresh meat premises. Each visit was undertaken so as to assess the operation of the plant under normal working conditions. The purposes of the HAT project were to assess the overall character of hygiene and welfare and provide a common criteria of assessment and scoring against which improvements can be judged, but also to plan the optimum use of MHS resources and achieve maximum cost effectiveness in the delivery of its services, and to provide a uniform and equitable service for all customers.

A considerable proportion of the Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVSs) of the MHS are veterinary practises engaged by contractual arrangements. As a full cost recovery service and in line with government policy towards the extension of competition to public services in the form of tendering and Market Testing, the MHS seeks to ensure that the work of OVSs is conducted at optimum proficiency and price. Furthermore, the MHS undertakes a statutory consultation exercise with all plant operators about its proposed charges for meat inspection. Plant operators have the opportunity under the Meat (Hygiene, Inspection and Examination for Residues) (Charges) Regulations 1995 to make representations about the proposed charges.

In setting up the MHS great care was taken to avoid imposing additional costs on the industry and the agency's organisation, structure and overheads are the minimum consistent with providing an effective service. The MHS is also subject to challenging annual financial and performance targets to ensure that it delivers its services in the most cost effective way.

Correspondence

Mr. Olner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the hon. Member for Nuneaton will receive a reply to his letter dated 17 April regarding issues raised by his constituent, Mr. M. Hewitt. [30355]

Mrs. Browning: I replied to the hon. Member's letter on 16 May.

"Rural England" White Paper

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made on the Government's review of rural training provision referred to on page 54 of the Government's "Rural England" White Paper. [30674]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responsible for reviewing the support for training provided through ATB-Landbase referred to in the "Rural England" White Paper.

The Ministry has placed a further contract with ATB-Landbase. The contract, worth nearly £2 million, runs to 31 March 1997 and covers strategic industry training organisation, ITO, and lead body activities for the agricultural and commercial horticulture industries, together with funding to maintain a quality-assured training instructor register. The contract also includes funding for projects embracing training promotion and the development of local initiatives. In the longer term, we believe that our funding should be channelled through a competition process to ensure that support meets the industry's training support requirements at a reasonable cost. In deciding how to take matters forward, we shall be taking into consideration the Department for Education and Employment's recent proposals for the ITO network.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95, which agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30571]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made no use of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30554]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested for permanent non-industrial staff in my Department including executive agencies on 1 April 1996 is as follows:

(a) Total male staff 5,776; total female staff 4,460.

(b)

Grade	*Total officials*	*Women employed*	*Percentage women*
1	1	0	0
2	4	1	25
3	20	1	5
4	13	0	0
5	102	12	12
6	185	22	12
7	831	168	20
SEO	1,083	267	25
HEO	1,589	462	29
EO	2,360	896	38

(c)

Grade	*Total officials*	*Women employed*	*Percentage women*
AO	2,472	1,607	65
AA	1,550	998	64

These figures are provisional and more precise information will be published later this year in "Civil Service Statistics" copies of which are available in the Library. Information is not separately available for executive agencies. Casual and seasonal staff are excluded. Figures for total numbers at some grades are not directly comparable with 1995 figures because of reorganisations within MAFF.

Animal Feed

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effects of the routine use of antibiotics in farm animal feed; and if he will make a statement. [30725]

Mrs. Browning: The use of additives in animal feedingstuffs is subject to directive 70/524/EEC, as amended. No feed additive is permitted unless, at the level permitted in feedingstuffs, it does not adversely affect human or animal health or the environment. The EC Commission is advised on these matters by the independent Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition—SCAN—and each approval is subject to agreement by the Standing Committee for Feedingstuffs.

In the UK, the possible development of antibiotic resistance in humans and animals from the use of antibiotics in animals is kept under review by the independent, scientific Veterinary Products Committee. The VPC has consistently followed the principles established in 1969 by the report of the joint committee on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry and veterinary medicine—the Swann report. The VPC's policy has been that new antimicrobials should not necessarily be precluded from therapeutic use in animals but that their prophylactic use should be discouraged.

Against this background, the committee continues to consider each case on its merits. The committee reviewed its policy last year and confirmed that it did not require amendment. In doing so, it recognised that many antibiotics are effective against both human and animal disease and a number licensed in human medicine are also authorised for therapeutic use in animals. Their use in human medicine, however, far outweighs any animal use.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the animal feed products into which his Department has conducted research in respect of the spread of BSE; what measures have been undertaken as a result of this research; and what measures he has undertaken to monitor their effectiveness. [29578]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* Epidemiological investigations identified meat and bone meal of ruminant origin as the vehicle of transmission of BSE. Evidence from transmission experiments suggests that meal derived from central nervous tissue presented the greatest risk, although other tissues defined as specified bovine material—SBM—could not be excluded. Experiments recently published tested the effectiveness of the rendering processes within the EU in inactivating the BSE agent. These showed that some rendering systems in use in the 1980s did not inactivate the BSE agent fully.

As a result of our understanding of BSE, largely resulting from various research programmes, a number of control measures were introduced:

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1988 prohibited the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminant animals on 18 July 1988.

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (No2) Order 1990 extended the ban on the use of specified bovine offals to any animal feed.

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1991 consolidated existing BSE legislation and introduced new provisions to prevent the use of meat and bone meal produced from SBOs as a fertiliser.

In June 1994 a procedure of on farm sampling of animal feed from premises visited as a result of reported BSE suspect cases was introduced.

The Spongiform Miscellaneous Encephalopathy (Amendments) Order 1994 extended the ruminant protein feed ban to include all mammalian protein in ruminant feedingstuffs.

Validation of all rendering plants handling animal waste by the end of 1994, in accordance with Commission decision 94/382 on the approval of alternative heat treatment systems for processing animal waste of ruminant origin. The requirements of the decision were included in the Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995.

The Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995 strengthened the controls in rendering plants handling SBOs by requiring them to operate dedicated rendering lines for the processing of SBO.

The random sampling of animal feed in feed mills commenced in February 1996 in accordance with Commission Decision 95/287.

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (Amendment) Order 1996 extended the mammalian protein feed ban to the feeding of mammalian protein to all farm animals, including horses and farmed fish.

The Fertilisers (Mammalian Meat and Bone Meal) Regulations 1996 prohibit the use of meat and bonemeal as, or in, fertiliser used on agricultural land. It is only permitted for use in private gardens, and within greenhouses and glass or plastic structures.

An enzyme linked immunoassay—ELISA—test has been developed to identify the presence of mammalian protein in animal feed. This has been used to monitor compliance with the ruminant feed ban.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many fishing vessels that were ejected from the register in 1988 are eligible to reapply and how many are not; what gross registered tonnage these vessels represent; and what kilowatts of power they have; [30579]

(2) under what circumstances fishing vessels ejected from the register in 1988 may be reinstated; and if, following reinstatement, they are eligible for licences to fish for United Kingdom quotas. [30580]

Mr. Baldry: Fishing vessels refused registration under the nationality provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 can be admitted to the British register only if they meet the current registration eligibility requirements. In order to be eligible owners must be:

(a) British citizens or persons who are nationals of a member state other than the United Kingdom and are established, within the meaning of article 52 of the EEC treaty, in the United Kingdom;

(b) bodies corporate incorporated in a member state with a place of business in the United Kingdom;

(c) European economic interest groupings, which are groupings formed in pursuance of article 1 of Council regulation (EEC) No. 2137/85 and registered in the United Kingdom;

(d) a local authority in the United Kingdom.

Reinstated vessels are granted licences only if they held one prior to deregistration and it has not been used to licence another vessel in the meantime. If the licence has been used in this way, owners of reinstated vessels can obtain licences to fish only by transfer from other licensed vessels. Tonnage and engine power figures for vessels refused registration in 1989 are not readily available.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many notices were issued in respect of animals destined for export under articles 15 and 16 of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 *(a)* between 23 January 1995 and 31 December 1995 and *(b)* in the first four months of 1996; [30720]

(2) how many notices were issued in respect of animals destined for export under articles 11 and 12 of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1992 in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* since 1 January 1995. [30719]

Mrs. Browning: Animals may begin journeys to other member states from many locations. Notices may be served for a variety of different circumstances, and there is no collection of information on a central basis. The figures requested could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* pigs were rejected as unfit to travel prior to export in each of the first four months of 1996. [30721]

Mrs. Browning: The reported number of farm animals inspected prior to export during 1996 and rejected as unfit for transport have been as follows:

	Bovine	*Ovine*	*Porcine*
January	103	471	128
February	251	204	60
March	28	131	69
April	n/a		

n/a = not yet available.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he has issued to *(a)* his staff of local veterinary inspectors and *(b)* local authorities as to the bringing of prosecutions in respect of animals rejected as unfit to travel prior to export; and if he will make a statement. [30723]

Mrs. Browning: Officials of the Department maintain regular contact with local authorities on enforcement issues. Local authorities are familiar with the considerations pertaining to offences under the order, and will prosecute if they consider the evidence to be strong enough to warrant this. The position relating to LVIs is as set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 13 May 1996, *Official Report,* columns *379-80.*

Decommissioning

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the Government's policy towards regulation COM (95) 55; [30763]

(2) what proposals he has for additional payments supplementary to decommissioning awards for shore fishermen who lost their jobs when their vessels were laid up. [30791]

Mr. Baldry: Document COM (95) 55 concerned a proposal which has now been adopted as Council Regulation 2719/95. It amends Council Regulation 3699/93 to allow member states to use funds allocated to them from the financial instrument for fisheries guidance to part-fund an early retirement scheme for fishermen and a compensation scheme for fishermen from decommissioned boats. The Government have always made it clear that they consider that such measures should be covered by national social security policies and are not an appropriate use of FIFG funds. The measures have not been included in those introduced in the UK under FIFG. The Government's view is that the needs of the industry are best served by using limited FIFG funds for decommissioning, vessel safety improvements, and improving marketing and processing and port facilities.

Unlike other self-employed persons, share fishermen have access to contributory unemployment benefits. This gives them special access to unemployment benefit and, from October 1996, to contribution-based jobseeker's allowance.

Cattle Cull

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to ensure that meat and livestock commissioners, Meat Hygiene Service and Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce officials observe his Department's rules on documentation, teeth and ear tags for cattle proposed for the 30-month culling scheme. [30803]

Mrs. Browning: Instructions are circulated to all officials involved in the operation of the scheme. Officials are required to observe the rules as they are for any other scheme.

Fisheries Service

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department last undertook a detailed review of the funding of the fisheries service; and what plans he has for a further review. [31010]

Mr. Baldry: The Department recently completed a fundamental expenditure review which included expenditure on fisheries. We also regularly examine our requirements for fisheries as part of the Department's financial planning arrangements.

Cattle Birth Registration

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the British Veterinary Association about vets' signatures on cattle birth registration documents. [28869]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 May 1996]:* The British Veterinary Association has made representations to the Chief Veterinary Officer about the role of local veterinary inspectors in facilitating cattle birth record documents which were introduced at the request of the industry after consultation with the British Veterinary Association and the British Cattle Veterinary Association.

We shall be making some minor changes to the present arrangements following further discussion with the relevant veterinary associations.

Council of Europe Meetings

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meetings of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995 have been attended by Ministers or officials of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29357]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* No Minister from my Department has attended any meeting of, or organised by, the Council of Europe since January 1995, but officials have attended 17 meetings over this period.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *578*, how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991. [29834]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter is delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the number of professional scientists and engineers employed at each grade in each of the Department's agencies has been passed to me for reply with regard to this Executive Agency. (29834)

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was launched on 1 April 1995 as an Executive Agency of MAFF. It took over from some 300 local authorities responsibility for enforcement of the hygiene and welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales. Consequently the MHS employed no scientists or engineers before that date.

The MHS headquarters are based in York where Chief Executive and the supporting functions of Operations, Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology are based. MHS services are managed by six regional offices. The Head of Operations as well as two of the regional Managers are qualified Veterinary Surgeons. The MHS also employs Official Veterinary Surgeons to supervise meat inspection staff working in plants. The MHS directly employs 22 Principal Official Veterinary Surgeons and 16 Official Veterinary Surgeons. In addition it contracts out work to 110 full time equivalent vets to supplement them. 5 vets are also utilised on a casual basis.

Letter from John FitzGerald to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on business, I have been asked by the Minister to reply on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to your question about the numbers of professional scientists and engineers employed at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in each year since 1991 as this is an operational matter for which the Chief Executive is responsible. (29834)

The number of full time equivalent staff employed as professional software engineers within the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in each year since 1991 is as follows:

	At 1 April					
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Senior Executive Officer	1	1	1	1	—	—
Grade 7	—	—	—	—	1	1

The number of full time equivalent staff employed in scientific grades within the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in each year since 1991 is as follows:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Higher Scientific Officer	1	1	—	—	—	1
Senior Scientific Officer	3	5	5	5	5	66
Pharmaceutical Officer I	—	1	1	1	—	—
Research Officer	4	8	7	7.5	6.5	9.4
Senior Research Officer II	6	6	5	4	4	3

For open structure grades of grade 7 and above, the following numbers of staff hold scientific degrees or equivalent qualifications and are engaged in the assessment of applications for marketing authorisations for veterinary medicines:

	At 1 April					
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Grade 7	5	5	5	5	6	7
Grade 6	3	2	2	2	2	2

The Director of Licensing (Grade 5) and the Chief Executive also hold scientific qualifications.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary question in which you asked how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in each of his Department's agencies in each year since 1991.[29834]

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office in 1992.

Most of the following posts are held by staff with scientific or engineering qualifications. We are unable to supply figures on a comparable basis before 1994.

	April 1994	*April 1995*	*April 1996*
ASO	145	145	148
Consultant	587	449	409
Principal consultant	—	—	1
Senior consultant	296	302	294
Grade 5	15	11	11
Grade 6	32	34	32
Grade 7	90	82	68
HSO	45	35	28
Scientific officer	102	84	71
Team manager	93	88	83

Letter from Mr. T. W. A. Little to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on the number of professional scientists employed in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA).

The VLA was established on 1 October 1995, from the merger of the existing Central Veterinary Laboratory with the Veterinary Investigation Service which was part of the State Veterinary Service. The following information therefore includes figures for the former Veterinary Investigation Service from October 1995.

No engineers are employed at the VLA. Professional scientists, by grade, employed since 1991 are as follows:

	Number
1 April 1991	
Grade 6	7
Grade 7	6
SROII	23
VRO	27
SSO	38
HSO	56
SO	66
ASO	110
	333
1 April 1992	
Grade 6	6
Grade 7	7
SRO II	19
VRO	24
SSO	32
HSO	57
SO	63
ASO	126
	334
1 April 1993	
Grade 6	7
Grade 7	7
SROII	21
VRO	25
SSO	34
HSO	56
SO	65
ASO	135
	350
1 April 1994	
Grade 6	6
Grade 7	8
SROII	20
VRO	24
SSO	33
HSO	56
SO	64
ASO	140
	351
1 April 1995	
Grade 6	7
Grade 7	6
SROII	15
VRO	21
SSO	32
HSO	52
SO	68
ASO	141
	342
1 April 1996	
Grade 6	7
Grade 7	6
SROII	15
VRO	24
SSO	32
HSO	49
SO	74
ASO	144
	351
Ex VIS 1 April 1996	
Gd 6 Supt VIOs	2
Grade 7	1
SROII	0
VIO	45
SSO	12
HSO	14
SO	35
ASO	99
SVIO	12
	220

Casuals have been excluded and part-time counted as "whole posts". Staff on temporary promotion have been counted in their substantive grades.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about the number of professional scientists and engineers employed in his Department's Agencies since 1991 in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

CSL was first launched as an executive agency of MAFF on 1 April 1992. Prior to that date staffing numbers were included as part of the departmental total. CSL does not employ engineers. The number of professional scientists employed during the Agency's first year of operation, 1992–93, was not recorded by grade, however the overall average figure for the year was some 312 out of a total of 443 staff. CSL was relaunched as an enlarged agency on 1 April 1994 following its merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories at Norwich and Aberdeen. The number of professional scientists employed at the start of each subsequent financial year was:

Grade	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Assistant Scientific Officer	103	115	122
Scientific Officer	136	137	145
Higher Scientific Officer	101	115	113
Senior Scientific Officer	69	74	62
Principal Scientific Officer	41	38	30
Grade 6	10	11	13
Grade 5	2	2	2
Grade 3	1	1	1

These figures include those employed on a fixed-term and casual basis.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 4 June 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about how many professional scientists and engineers have been employed in the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) since 1991, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

PSD has only been in existence as an Agency since April 1993. Since 1993 the following number of scientific staff have been employed:

Grade	Number in post
1993	
5	1
6	1
7	15
SSO	25
HSO	49
SO	15
ASO	1
1994	
5	1
6	1
7	15
SSO	27
HSO	50
SO	20
ASO	6
1995	
5	1
6	1
7	15
SSO	28
HSO	52
SO	27
ASO	6
1996	
5	1
6	1
7	15
SSO	28
HSO	52
SO	29
ASO	8

All scientific staff within the Agency from Scientific Officer and above hold a bioscience degree or equivalent.

There are not qualified engineers within the Agency.

Goosanders

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the published scientific studies evaluated by his Department into damage to fisheries in England caused by Goosanders. [29841]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* We are not aware of any scientific studies on the damage to fisheries by Goosanders in England. Investigations into such damage for selected sites in England are part of the current three-year research and development programme commissioned in 1995 by this Ministry, the Department of the Environment and the Environment Agency. The results of the research will be published as they become available.

Food Retail Outlets (Lighting)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures control the use of artificial light in the display of *(a)* meat and *(b)* other foodstuffs in retail outlets; what plans he has for further regulations in this area; and if he will make a statement. [29630]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/1763) require "adequate natural and/or artificial lighting" in all food premises covered by these regulations, to help ensure hygienic handling.

This Department has no plans to introduce further controls.

Horticultural Research

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the extent of funding for horticultural research from his Department *(a)* in each year of the last five years and *(b)* planned for each of the next two years. [30017]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* The Department's expenditure on horticultural research in each of the last five years and planned expenditure for the present year are:

Year	£ million
1991–92	[1]10.5
1992–93	[1]11.1
1993–94	[1]11.4
1994–95	13.4
1995–96	13.6
1996–97	13.6

[1] Excludes some work on pesticides for horticultural crops.

Subject to the usual constraints of public expenditure planning, present expectations are that in 1997–98 expenditure will be at a similar level to 1996–97.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which *(a)* the Government are required to consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* the Government are required to publish their response to advice supplied. [21852]

Mr. Boswell *[pursuant to his reply 22 April 1996, Official Report, column 51]:* Agriculture Ministers are required, under section 62 (3) of the Medicines Act 1968, to consult the Veterinary Products Committee before making an order and, under section 16(9)(a) of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, to consult the Advisory Committee on Pesticides before making an order. There is no requirement to consult our other advisory non-departmental public bodies prior to legislative proposals or to publish our response to advice supplied by them, or the Veterinary Products Committee.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 June 1996

DEFENCE

United Nations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages of establishing a standby military headquarters unit within the UN department of peacekeeping operations in New York; [30732]

(2) what is his policy in respect of developing and strengthening the ability of the United Nations to undertake effective and detailed military planning; and if he will make a statement; [30733]

(3) what proposals he has in respect of the development of *(a)* generic and *(b)* specific contingency plans for the UN for future peacekeeping operations; and if he will make a statement. [30734]

Mr. Soames: The proposal to establish a standby headquarters unit is a natural extension of earlier work by the Secretary-General which identified the need to strengthen the UN's capacity to conduct and plan peacekeeping operations and which the UK has fully supported. The Secretary-General has already taken important steps to improve the UN's capabilities, in particular by the development of a mission planning service. Increasing the operational effectiveness of the UN is one of the Government's principal foreign policy objectives and both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are involved in discussions aimed at continuing to take these initiatives forward. To give practical help, we currently attach nine military officers and one civil servant to the department of peacekeeping operations, and we continue to co-operate fully with the UN standby forces planning team.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets he has set for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in 1996–97. [31518]

Mr. Soames: The targets set for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in 1996–97 are as follows:

(a) Consistent with achieving an average of at least 6 per cent. return on capital employed over a period of three years, the target for 1996–97 is 4 per cent.

(b) Increase DERA overall utilisation target from 57 per cent. in 1995–96 to 62.4 per cent. in 1996–97.

(c) Increase DERA overall milestone delivery target from 84 per cent. in 1995–96 to 89 per cent. in 1996–97.

(d) Increase DERA overall customer satisfaction as measured by the annual survey from 27 percentile points above average in 1995–96 to 30 percentile points in 1996–97.

(e) To establish an effective capability measurement system through technical assessment and to measure an improvement in the DRA sectors and two protection and life sciences division sectors.

(f) To have met by 31 March 1997 all the 1996–97 rationalisation project milestones.

(g) To achieve a non-MOD income of £117 million.

(h) To achieve formal quality certification to ISO 9000 for all DRA and DERA support services division sectors, plus the centre for defence analysis and the chemical and electronics sector and centre for human sciences sectors of PLSD.

(i) All division except the defence test and evaluation organisation to demonstrate an improvement in staff satisfaction, and to demonstrate improvements in the working environment, career development and training, and reward and recognition. DTEO to participate to form a baseline.

(j) To establish a methodology for measuring technology transfer.

MV Kapitan Mezentsyev (Defects)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *560*, if he will list the minor defects identified on the merchant vessel Kapitan Mezentsyev. [30731]

Mr. Soames: The following defects were identified: A fractured starboard fibreglass lifeboat; inoperable davit switches; badly maintained winch falls and davit; a repair required on a fire station in the after steering compartment and an inoperable watertight door.

All these were remedied at once, and the vessel inspected to the satisfaction of the US authorities.

Defence Police and Guarding Structure

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will issue a further consultative document on the Defence police and guarding structure. [31598]

Mr. Soames: This consultative document was issued on 29 May. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the scientific information that has been made available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines since November 1995; and on what dates the committee considered that evidence. [31287]

Mr. Malone: Proceedings of meetings of the committee are confidential.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates the National Audit Office most recently examined the Medicines Control Agency; and what assessment the National Audit Office made of expenditure relating to the sub-committees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [31288]

Mr. Malone: The National Audit Office audit of the Medicines Control Agency's 1995–96 accounts is currently in progress. The audit of the 1994–95 account was completed in May 1995. In the course of that audit the National Audit Office reviewed MCA expenditure generally. No comment was received with regard to expenditure relating to the sub-committees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of general practitioner fundholders saving in each region has been spent other than by fundholders themselves, in each of the last four years. [29666]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* Fundholders may choose to return savings for wider use in the national health service. Information about savings returned in this way will be placed in the Library.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report* column *521*, which advisers were given the elements of the data on desogestrel and gestodene; and on which dates. [31289]

Mr. Malone: Communications between the Licensing Authority and its independent safety advisers are confidential.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *521*, on what dates in 1989, 1991 and 1995 the Committee on Safety of Medicines reviewed the safety of oral contraceptives containing desogestrel and gestodene. [31286]

Mr. Malone: The safety of oral contraceptives containing gestodene or desogestrel was reviewed in March 1989, February 1991, May 1995 and October 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the estimates made by the Medicines Control Agency of the incidence of venous thromboembolism associated with, *(a)* desogestrel, *(b)* gestodene and *(c)* levonorgestrel both in June 1995 and on 13 October 1995. [31276]

Mr. Malone: In June 1995, information on the incidence of venous thromboembolism with specific combined oral contraceptives preparations was not available. By 13 October 1995 new information had become available which provided the following estimates of the incidence of venous thromboembolism: for oral contraceptives containing levonorgestrel approximately 15 cases per 100,000 women each year, for oral contraceptives containing gestodene or desogestrel approximately 30 cases per 100,000 women each year.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what location the 190,000 letters relating to oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene were dispatched. [31277]

Mr. Malone: Horndean, Hampshire.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his officials made prior to despatch of the "Dear Doctor" letter of 18 October 1995 relating to oral contraceptives of the proportion of letters that would be received by doctors prior to the public announcement scheduled for the afternoon of Thursday 19 October 1995. [31278]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made on 23 October 1995 at columns 701–2. The letters were posted by first class post on Wednesday 18 October 1995. Officials expected that most doctors would receive a copy of the letter, by means of at least one of the three mechanisms of communication used, prior to the public announcement scheduled for Thursday 19 October 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates on which Ministers received updates regarding the analysis of the World Health Organisation study; and whether Ministers asked the Medicines Control Agency to seek the advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October 1995. [31279]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 7 March at column *321*. Ministers were not updated regarding the analysis of the World Health Organisation's study between July and October since there was no material change in the findings of the study.

It is normal practice for the Medicines Control Agency to seek the committee's advice on all safety issues with medicines which have important public health implications. Ministers did not ask the MCA to seek the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on this issue.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date, and at what time, the press conference as originally scheduled was made known to the media; and on what date and at what time the revised timing of the public announcement was made available to the media. [31280]

Mr. Malone: The public announcement last year about the safety of certain oral contraceptives was originally planned as a press notice, to be issued in the afternoon of 19 October, having allowed time for doctors and pharmacists to receive the information already sent to them. As a result of inquiries from the electronic media, which were received from 9 am that day, it was decided to bring the announcement forward to 12 noon so that it could inform lunchtime news coverage on radio and television. The Department does not keep records showing the precise times at which the media are informed of forthcoming press conferences.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1153*, what steps his officials took to establish that data collection for the transnational study had been completed and if the stage in the recruitment process was communicated to the Committee on Safety of Medicines prior to or during its meeting on 13 October 1995.[31281]

Mr. Malone: Officials from the Medicines Control Agency asked the investigators of the transnational study what stage had been reached in recruitment for their study. They were informed that the data on venous thromboembolism were complete but identification of

cases of myocardial infarction was still in progress and it was understood that substantive data would not be available for one to two years. The Committee on Safety of Medicines were informed of this at the meeting on 13 October 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his officials contributed to the drafting of a letter attributed to the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines which was published in the *British Medical Journal* of 4 November 1995. [31282]

Mr. Malone: The letter was written by the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, who discussed its contents with officials before finalising it.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 19 December 1955, *Official Report*, column *1149*, if he will list the United Kingdom representatives on the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products in October 1995. [31283]

Mr. Malone: The two members of the Committee representing the United Kingdom competent authority are Dr. Susan Wood and Dr. David Jefferys.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1149*, which of the United Kingdom representatives on the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products made the formal request that the safety of oral contraceptives containing desogestrel and gestodene be placed on the agenda for the meeting of the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products on 17 and 18 October 1995. [31284]

Mr. Malone: Dr. Susan Wood, representing the United Kingdom competent authority.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *522*, if Professor John Guillebaud attended the meeting on 10 October 1995 relating to desogestrel and gestodene. [31285]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December 1995 at column *1151*.

PRIME MINISTER

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals there are to change the 1996–97 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office other services vote. [31583]

The Prime Minister: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Cabinet Office other services, class XVIII, vote 1, will be increased by £741,000 from £36,941,000 to £37,682,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £741,000 from £39,845,000 to £40,586,000.

This is to reflect the transfer from the Home Office, class VII, vote 1, of provision for certain Government car service costs; and the transfer from the Office of Public Service, class XVIII, vote 1, of provision for Admiralty house and other central service costs.

The increases are offset by interdepartmental transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals there are to change the 1996–97 cash limit or running costs limit for the Office of Public Service and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. [31597]

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary and revised estimates, the cash limit for the Office of Public Service, class XVII, vote 1, will be increased by £434,000 from £173,540,000 to £173,974,000 and the gross running cost limit will be decreased by £14,411,000 from £88,512,000 to £74,101,000. The cash limit for stationery and printing payments to Her Majesty's Stationery Office, class XVII, vote 4, will be reduced by £1,091,000 from £2,282,000 to £1,191,000. The changes reflect the transfer from HMSO to the Office of Public Service, from the expected date of its sale, of the subsidy to public libraries on Government and other publications, and the supply of publications to United Kingdom members of the European Parliament together with the costs of the HMSO residual body; the transfer of provision for central services to the Cabinet Office: other services, class XVIII, vote 1; and the transfer of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency and Occupational Health and Safety Agency from gross to net running costs. The increase in the cash limit for the Office of Public Service will be offset by a transfer and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Treasury's running costs and cash limits in 1996–97. [31737]

Mr. Jack: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised estimate, the running costs limit for class XVI, vote 1 will be reduced by £804,000 from £58,122,000 to £57,318,000. The cash limit remains unchanged. The reduction reflects savings which will meet the cost of advisers fees in connection with the privatisation of certain Paymaster functions, which is still subject to ministerial decision.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Registry of Friendly Societies' cash and running costs limits in 1996–97. [31738]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 9, the Registry of Friendly Societies will be increased by £1,330,000 from £6,340,000 to £7,670,000. The increase is required for additional capital expenditure in respect of the registry's relocation to Victory house in 1996–97.

The increase will be offset by savings on class XVI, votes 1 and 16, and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Buying Agency

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what targets he has set for the Buying Agency. [31592]

Mr. Freeman: Following the transfer of the agency from the Department of the Environment on 1 January, I have set targets for 1996 as follows:

Financial

1. To generate a return on capital employed of 8 per cent.—this was applied to the last six months of 1995 and was achieved.
2. To achieve a growth in sales of the core business of 20 per cent.—the outturn for 1995 was £137 million.

Productivity

3. To reduce the basic cost per £ of core business sales to 2.6p—the outturn for 1995 was 2.8p, additional development costs in 1996 will not be included in this target.
4. To retain all existing utilities business and achieve a 4 per cent. increase in the number of customers—this is a new target.

Customer satisfaction

5. To deliver 93 per cent. of all direct orders by the due date—the outturn for 1995 was 92 per cent.
6. To resolve 95 per cent. of all customer complaints in one month and the rest within three months—the outturn for 1995 was 94 per cent.

Internal quality

7. To gain accreditation as "Investors in People"—this is a new target.

Environmental

8. To create an environmental effects register of TBA's activities as described in the BS 7750 standard—this is a new target.

TREASURY

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of mortgage interest tax relief would have been in each year since 1994–95 if relief had been available at 25 per cent. [30193]

Mr. Jack: The total cost of mortgage interest relief and the estimated cost if relief was available at 25 per cent., for the years 1994–95 to 1996–97 for the UK as a whole, are as follows:

£ million

	Cost of mortgage interest relief	*Cost of relief if available at 25 per cent.*
1994–95	3,500	4,400
1995–96	2,700	4,500
1996–97[1]	2,500	4,200

[1] Estimates for 1996–97 are provisional. They are based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current estimated average building society interest rate of 7.03 per cent.

The rate of relief in 1994–95 was 20 per cent. From 1995–96 onwards it has been 15 per cent.

Factor 8

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons the medical aid recombinant factor 8 is not zero-rated; and if he will now zero rate it. [31088]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1977 the then Government agreed with other member states, under the terms of the EC sixth VAT directive, not to extend the scope of our existing VAT zero rates and so it is not now possible to zero rate these products.

Human blood and substances derived from it, including plasma-derived factor 8, are exempt from VAT under items 6 and 7 of group 7 of schedule 9 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994. However, recombinant factor 8, being synthetic and not derived from human blood, does not fall within this exemption and so is subject to VAT at the standard rate.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of people who pay income tax on invalid care allowance; and how much was received in tax on invalid care allowance in 1995–96. [30713]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The estimated revenue yield for 1995–96 is about £5 million. This is an estimate of the income tax attributable on the benefit, by applying the recipients' average rate of income tax on the whole of their income to the amount of benefit received. About 100,000 individuals who receive invalid care allowance were liable to income tax.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Bodies

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) of 15 May, *Official Report*, column *489* on the future of the Commission for the New Towns, what representations he has received on the need for an overarching body to control the sale of assets by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Ministry of Defence and *(c)* other Departments of State, with particular reference to the impact of sales of land on land values in new town areas. [31016]

Sir Paul Beresford: We see no case for setting up an overarching body. The announcement on 15 May concerned the assets, rights and liabilities of new towns, urban development corporations and housing action trusts only. We believe that this proposal provides the best way of maximising returns to the Exchequer from sales of land in new town areas and for handling residual matters from the urban development corporations and housing action trusts effectively and economically. The general policy on disposing of Government land is a matter for my right hon. Friend and the learned Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Development Plans

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he is putting in place for the consideration of further changes to the system of development plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. [31792]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On 13 March I published proposals to amend the code of practice on development plans and the development plan regulations in order to help speed up the process of adoption by local authorities of area-wide local plans and unitary development plans. The changes proposed in those documents have been broadly welcomed and, subject to consideration of the detailed comments received, will be implemented as soon as possible. I also indicated that I had not ruled out further changes, if these were wanted by the users of the development plan system. Meetings are now being held with a range of organisations representing those with an interest in the operation of the system, including the local authorities, developers and environmental groups. Suggestions for change can also be submitted in writing to: The Secretary, Development plans review, room C13/20, 2 Marsham street, London SW1P 3EB, to arrive not later than 30 June. If it is decided to bring forward further firm proposals for changes to the system, these will be subject to consultation in the usual way.

Blight Working Group

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the interdepartmental working group on blight will issue a paper summarising the main issues for consideration. [31793]

Sir Paul Beresford: A paper has been published today, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The paper, which covers the whole of Great Britain, seeks views on whether any practical changes can be made to the existing arrangements for property purchase and compensation, bearing in mind the particular concerns of the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill about those whose properties decline in value because of the perception of potential purchases rather than because of any physical effects.

Comments are invited by 31 July from all those with an interest in generalised blight.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash and running costs limits for 1996–97. [31802]

Mr. Gummer: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised and summer supplementary estimates, the following cash limit changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 1—housing and construction, England—covering sections A, D to G and J to L of that vote, will be decreased by £10,950,000 from £341,518,000 to £330,568,000. This change reflects transfers of £2,000,000 to provide for a new asylum seekers' special housing grant which will not be cash limited; £5,200,000 to class VI, vote 2—regeneration, countryside and wildlife—and a transfer of £4,300,000 within the rough sleepers initiative from current to capital expenditure, the latter of which falls within the DOE/HC non-voted cash limit. The decreases are partially offset by an increase of £550,000 in Housing Corporation administration provision.

The DOE/HC—Housing Corporation—cash limit will be increased by £4,300,000 from £1,030,199,000 to £1,034,499,000 because of the transfer of provision for the rough sleepers initiative from current to capital expenditure.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2—regeneration, countryside and wildlife—will be increased by £6,656,000 from £1,452,787,00 to £1,459,443,000. This reflects a transfer of £5,200,000 from class VI, vote 1—housing and construction—to the Docklands light railway and the London docklands development corporation to cover repair costs following the bombing at south quay in February 1996. An increase of £1,456,000 is also required to pay European regional development fund claims not accepted for payment by the European Community. The increase will be met by a transfer from the DOE/ERDF non-voted cash limit and will therefore not add to the planned control total of public expenditure.

The DOE/RCW—regeneration, countryside and wildlife—non-voted cash limit will also be increased by £6,656,000 from £1,434,387,000 to £1,441,043,000 for the reasons given in paragraph 4.

The DOE/ERDF—European regional development fund—non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £1,440,000 from £184,222,000 to £182,782,000. This reflects a transfer of £16,000 from the Department of Health for the St. Gabriel's church scheme and a transfer of £1,456,000 to DOE/RCW for the new ERDF sections to cover gross payments in place of European Community receipts.

The external financing limit for urban development corporations will be increased by £5,200,000 to £207,050,000 to cover repair costs for Docklands light railway and London docklands development corporation following the bombing at south quays. The external financing limit for the Urban Regeneration Agency, English Partnerships, will be increased by £13,652,000 for provision for current spending which was incorrectly omitted from the introduction to the 1996–97 supply estimates.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 4—local government and planning, England—covering sections A to F of that vote, will be reduced by £80,000 from £31,128,167,000 to £31,128,087,000 to reflect reductions in the payments made to the Valuation Office Agency in section A valuation services. The savings will be used within vote 4, to cover a payment in South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority under the Bellwin scheme in section H, other grants, which is outside the cash limit on the vote.

All the increases will be offset either by savings or transfers from other Government Departments and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Power

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what comparative studies he had initiated of the policies and principles informing the time scale for full dismantling of nuclear power generating plants in *(a)* the USA, *(b)* France and *(c)* Germany; and if he will make a statement. [31084]

Mr. Lang: None.

All UK nuclear power generating plants but one are gas cooled, whereas almost all the plants in the three countries identified are water cooled. There would, therefore, be little purpose in conducting such studies.

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the advertising budget for nuclear privatisation in the current year; and what it has been in each of the last two years. [31142]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* There was no expenditure on advertising for the privatisation of the nuclear industry in the year 1994–95. Actual expenditure on privatisation of the nuclear industry, including advertising, will be reported to Parliament in the normal way.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to his Department's cash and running costs limits for 1996–97. [31801]

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 1—programmes and administration—will be reduced by £8,416,000 from £1,310,071,000 to £1,301,655,000. This net reduction results from:

(i) the transfer on to the vote of the external financing limit of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (–£5,600,000);

(ii) a reduction of expenditure on both international subscriptions (–£2,461,000) and consultancy (–£210,000) the sum of which will be used to find a non-voted increase in the external financing limit of Companies House; and

(iii) the transfer of responsibility for Southampton buildings to the Department of National Heritage (–£145,000).

Within this total, the gross running cost limit for the Department of Trade and Industry is being increased by £4,800,000 from £3,359,237,000 to £364,037,000. This change comprises:

(i) an adjustment in Insolvency Service fee income required for accounting purposes (£5,000,000);

offset by transfers of provision to:

(ii) the Department of National Heritage (£145,000); and

(iii) the non-cash-limit agency and central services area of the vote (£55,000).

On a net basis, the Insolvency Service adjustment sums to zero as a fully compensating increase in receipts is also required.

Additionally; subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 12—Office of Gas Supply—will be increased by £2,000,000 from £5,743,000 to £7,743,000 and the running costs limit by £825,000 from £7,627,000 to £8,452,000.

The requirement for an increase results from the necessary costs associated with introduction of domestic competition and the transfer of the gas measurement branch from class IV, vote 1. This will involve expenditure on consultancy and staff related costs together with urgent expenditure on accommodation to comply with health and safety requirements.

The increase will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Radiocommunications Agency

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set his Department's Radiocommunications Agency for 1996–97. [31799]

Mr. Lang: I have set my Department's Radiocommunications Agency the following quality of service targets for 1996–97 in respect of its licensing work and enforcement activities. These are in addition to achieving an overall efficiency improvement of 6 per cent. over 1995–96 and to continue to recover the full costs of its activities from customers.

Licensing

Category A: Licences that involve no frequency assignment, site clearance or international co-ordination; 100 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within five working days.

Category B: Licences that involve frequency assignment but no site clearance or international co-ordination; 90 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within 15 working days, with the remainder to be processed and despatched within 25 working days or an explanation for the delay provided to the applicant.

Category C: Licences that require frequency assignment and site clearance and/or international co-ordination, 90 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within 40 working days and the remainder to be processed and despatched within 60 working days or an explanation for the delay provided to the applicant.

Category D: Renewals of all licences in category A to be processed and despatched within 5 working days, renewals of licences in categories B and C to be processed and despatched within 10 working days.

Enforcement

100 per cent. of safety of life services complaints to be investigated within 24 hours;

98 per cent. of business complaints to be investigated within five days;

98 per cent. of domestic interference complaints to be investigated within one month.

I also expect the agency's enquiry point to improve its response rate to calls within 30 seconds to 92 per cent. and for 95 per cent. and for 95 per cent. of all invoices to be paid within 30 days, or within the timescale agreed with suppliers. In addition, the chief executive will continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Worker Information and Consultation

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will report on the consultation exercise recently undertaken by his Department in relation to the European Commission's communication on worker information and consultation. [31803]

Mr. Lang: I have today placed a summary of the responses to the consultation in the Library of the House, together with a copy of the Government's response to the European Commission's communication.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set his Department's National Weights and Measures Laboratory for 1996–97. [31800]

Mr. Lang: I have set National Weights and Measures Laboratory the following targets for 1996–97:

- to ensure that external fee-earning activities remain self-financing;
- to reduce the real cost of a programme hour by 1 per cent.;
- to complete 85 per cent. of European type approvals within 10 weeks;
- to complete 95 per cent. of all calibration jobs—including preparation of certificates—within 18 working days.

On moving to net running costs control, I expect NWML to meet its net vote target in 1996–97.

In addition, I expect the chief executive of NWML to continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [30259]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* Diary commitments preclude my visiting the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the foreseeable future.

Information Society Initiative

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the operation of the two pilot schemes running in Manchester and Harlow under the information society initiative. [30728]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The information society initiative pilot local support centres at Manchester and Harlow are both open. The Manchester centre, based at the national computing centre, was formally opened on 13 February and the Harlow centre, which is based at the Harlow information and technology training centre, ITEC, was opened on 19 March 1996.

Both have facilities for businesses to get "hand-on" experience of using the Internet, world wide web, etcetera for commercial purposes, to encourage electronic commerce, and provide advice sessions and training courses for small businesses. Both are working with local business link partnerships in the development of services. The Manchester centre has been running training course for business link advisers and counsellors.

A countrywide network of local support centres will be established over the course of the information society initiative.

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Pensions

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the gross annual cost of increasing the basic state pension by *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10 and *(c)* £20 a week; what would be *(x)* the annual savings in means-tested benefits and *(y)* increased Treasury receipts from income tax if the basic state pension was increased by (i) £5, (ii) £10 and (iii) £20 a week; and what increase in national insurance contributions would be needed to meet the net cost from increasing the basic state pension by (1) £5, (2) £10 and (3) £20 a week. [30165]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Cost and benefit effects of increases to basic state pension

1996–97 prices

£ billion

	Gross cost to national insurance fund	*Saving in income related benefits*	*Increase in treasury income tax receipts*
Basic retirement pension increased by £5	2.7	0.7	0.2
Basic retirement pension increased by £10	5.4	1.5	0.5
Basic retirement pension increased by £20	10.8	2.9	1.1

1. Estimates of cost to the national insurance fund are supplied by the Government Actuary's department.

2. Calculations are based on increasing basic retirement pension only and assume that increases are applied to all recipients of any basic RP.

3. Savings in income-related benefits are calculated using the policy simulation model 1996–97, based on the family expenditure surveys 1991, 1992 and 1993.

4. Income tax effects have been calculated by the Inland Revenue using a projection of the 1994 family expenditure survey and are provisional.

5. All cost are rounded to the nearest £100 million, 1996–97 prices.

Effects of increasing basic state pension on class 1 national insurance contribution rates

Percentage

	Employee main rate	*Employer main rate*
Current rates	10.0	10.2
Basic retirement pension increased by £5	10.8	10.7
Basic retirement pension increased by £10	11.6	11.3
Basic retirement pension increased by £20	13.4	12.4

1. Rates are rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

2. The new contribution rates are derived by maintaining equity between the burden of extra contributions borne by the employee and the employer for an employee on average earnings.

Child Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the types of non-advanced courses which are recognised for the purpose of claiming child benefit for a child aged between 16 and 19 years. [30240]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of child benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Peter L. Pike, dated 4 June 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the types of non-advanced courses which are recognised for the purpose of claiming child benefit for a child aged between 16 and 19 years.

There are nearly 90 courses of education which are classed as non-advanced. They include GCE "A" level, GCSE and SCE Higher Grade or equivalent, GNVQ/NVQ levels 1,2 and 3, B/TEC National Diploma, SCOTVEC National Certificate of 6th Year Studies, Foundation art course and secretarial course with GCSE entry. Others, such as Pathway, Horizon and Gateway, can be grouped together under "Special Needs" courses. The remainder can be grouped together as "Job Specific".

This would include courses such as Hotel and Catering, Travel and Tourism.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring the Child Support Agency undertakes *(a)* of the number of its clients who become insolvent following its intervention and *(b)* of the change in the number of clients becoming insolvent; and what procedures the agency adopts to avoid a client becoming insolvent following its intervention. [30692]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 4 June 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency clients.

No formal records are kept of the number of clients who report that they have become insolvent following contact with the Agency, nor does the Agency petition for bankruptcy.

Absent parents are always left with at least 70% of their income (67% if paying arrears) after a child maintenance assessment has been made. It should also be remembered that it could be the parent with care who has been made insolvent because legally due child maintenance has not been paid.

The Agency has a legal liability to enforce maintenance payments in suitable cases even if it reaches the stage of court proceedings, to protect the interest of the taxpayer and the parent with care.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the numbers and percentages of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the numbers and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30555]

Mr. Burt: The information is set out in the tables:

Permanent staff in post at 1 April 1996

	Number
Male	31,709
Female	65,797

Principal grades

Grade	Total staff	Total women	Percentage women
1–4	29	8	27.6
5	105	25	23.8
6	434	130	30.0
7	641	165	25.7
Senior Executive Officer	1,256	381	30.3
Higher Executive Officer	5,204	2,394	46.0
Executive Officer	26,314	16,513	62.8
Total	33,983	19,616	57.7

Administrative grades

Grade	Total staff	Total women	Percentage women
Administrative Officer	48,982	36,409	74.3
Administrative Assistant	11,452	7,876	68.8
Total	60,434	44,285	73.2

Staff numbers in grades not regarded as either principal or administrative, e.g. support grade bands 1 and 2

Total staff	Total women	Percentage women
3,089	1,896	61.4

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30772]

Mr. Burt: The Department employs 1,675 registered disabled people. This represents 1.8 per cent. of the total number of staff employed by this Department.

Benefits Agency

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the savings to the Benefits Agency of the arrangements whereby mail hand-delivered to the agency in Stockport is re-delivered to that agency by the Royal Mail via Crewe. [31054]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 4 June 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what assessment he has made of the savings to the Benefits Agency (BA) of the

arrangements whereby mail hand-delivered to the Agency in Stockport is re-delivered to that Agency by the Royal Mail via Crewe.

As part of the 'Competing for Quality' initiative the BA has market tested its accommodation and office services, which includes arrangements for the collection, sorting and opening of post. The in-house team won the contract and sub-contracted the post opening service for the Greater Manchester Area to Royal Mail.

This means that as District Office staff are no longer involved in the post opening process they can now concentrate on the core business of the Agency, which is the processing of benefits.

All BA offices in Manchester have external boxes where our customers can hand-deliver items of post. All post is opened by Royal Mail and distributed across the District within 24 hours. There are notices on the external boxes telling customers at what times the boxes are emptied.

The post opening arrangements are just one of a whole package of services delivered under the accommodation and office services contracts and therefore it is not possible to attribute a financial saving to one specific task within the package.

However, it is estimated that savings of 29 per cent. will be made for the whole of the Greater Manchester area in respect of accommodation and office services, which include post opening, over the duration of the contract.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) of 15 May, *Official Report* column *451* (1) how many home visits were made by Benefits Agency staff for the periods *(a)* April 1980 to April 1984, *(b)* April 1985 to April 1989, *(c)* April 1990 to April 1991 and *(d)* April 1992 to April 1994; [31089]

(2) if he will make a statement on the discrepancy between the figures quoted in the answer and the answer given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1503*. [31090]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested as figures on some areas of work are not collated nationally. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

The error in the written answer given to the hon. Member for Garscadden related to the number of effective supplementary benefit visits for April 1979 to March 1980. This was due to a clerical error and resulted from double counting of data.

The table also includes data on effective contributory benefit visits in 1979–80 and 1984–85 which were erroneously omitted from my written answer of 15 May to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks).

	Effective supplementary benefit/income support visits	*Effective contributory benefit visits*
18 April 1979—15 April 1980	—	428,784
16 April 1980—14 April 1981	3,490,320	309,094
15 April 1981—13 April 1982	3,554,302	220,495
14 April 1982—12 April 1983	3,385,476	180,068
13 April 1983—10 April 1984	3,515,234	128,778
11 April 1984—9 April 1985	—	129,627
10 April 1985—8 April 1986	2,356,203	129,664
9 April 1986—7 April 1987	1,578,038	352,728
8 April 1987—8 April 1988	1,228,694	174,653
11 April 1988—31 March 1989	960,746	n/a
April 1990—March 1991	580,900	n/a
April 1992—March 1993	509,722	n/a
April 1993—March 1994	505,507	n/a

1. The table includes supplementary benefit and income support visits for all the periods requested and contributory benefits visits for April 1980 to April 1988.

2. The contributory benefits figures include visits made to employers in relation to national insurance contributions.

3. Information is not available for contributory benefits for 1988–89, 1990–91, 1992–93 and 1993–94 as there were no figures collated for this period.

4. Data in respect of periods prior to 1989 may not be directly these comparable with one in respect of later periods as the Benefits Agency no longer holds detailed guidance on interpretation of the earlier data.

5. Contributory benefit data were not collected for the period April 1990 to March 1994.

6. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Access Committee for England

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to make a statement on the review of the role of the Access Committee for England. [31735]

Mr. Burt: I am pleased that the review acknowledged the valuable work undertaken by the Access Committee for England in providing a forum for discussion that involves all interested parties and in fostering local access groups. The review also found that the committee's ministerial advisory role had worked less well. This finding, allied with the setting up of the National Disability Council to advise the Government on issues relating to discrimination against disabled people, has persuaded me and my hon. Friends the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency and the Under-Secretary for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), that this aspect of ACE's work should cease. We have therefore agreed to offer funding for the committee for two years from April 1996 to allow time for it to continue to develop those areas where it has proved most effective. These arrangements will be reviewed before the end of that period.

This revised remit will enable ACE to focus more clearly on promoting the accessibility to disabled people of buildings and of indoor and outdoor environments—including housing—by:

- actively promoting the formation of local access groups and providing them with advice and support;
- providing a focal point for information on access matters for individual disabled people and others, referring them where appropriate to other agencies;
- consulting and offering practical advice on access matters to local government associations, industrial and commercial representative organisations, professional bodies, voluntary organisations and other interested groups; and
- advising local authorities and other agencies which may be considering the designation of access officers.

In view of the committee's changed role, I shall no longer have any responsibility for appointing members or determining its constitution.

Family Credit

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to implement the measure he announced in November 1995 to terminate payment of family credit when the last remaining dependent child in a family leaves full-time education. [31736]

Mr. Roger Evans: I am today laying before the House the Family Credit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996, which will give effect to that measure, and the associated report of the Social Security Committee with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's response to it. The regulations, subject to negative resolution, will come into effect from 2 July 1996.

Lone Parents

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the Social Security Advisory Committee's report about his proposals to restructure benefits for lone parents and his response to it. [31796]

Mr. Lilley: I am today publishing the committee's report and my response to it, together with draft regulations. From April 1997, the lone parent premium in the income-related benefits will be replaced by an additional element to be incorporated into the family premium. One parent benefit will be replaced by an additional element to be incorporated into the main child benefit rates. The benefits system is relatively more generous to lone parents than to couples. The regulations will provide a more flexible mechanism for adjusting the relative level of support provided to these different types of households. I intend, over time, and without cash losses to individuals, to narrow the gap between benefits that go to lone parents and those that go to couples.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish a response to the third report of the Social Security Committee of Session 1995–96 on housing benefit fraud HC 90. [31797]

Mr. Lilley: I have today laid copies of the Government's response to the Social Security Select Committee's report "Housing Benefit Fraud" before the House and copies have been placed in the Library. I am also announcing two new measures to reinforce our anti-fraud initiatives. First, we will be setting up a ministerial group on countering benefit fraud, which will focus on cross-Government action and include all Departments with a role in tackling benefit fraud.

Secondly, there will be an improved flow of information from Inland Revenue to DSS officials under section 122 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. The development of data matching to combat serious social security fraud means that the undertaking to limit the transfer of information, given on 22 April 1986, *Official Report*, column *1603*, should be relaxed.

Taken together with other measures, these represent a further considerable step forward in our fight to stop benefit fraud.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Housing Benefit Fraud

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been successfully prosecuted for fraudulent claims relating to housing benefit in each year since 1991; what assessment he has made of the correlation between the number of criminal prosecutions for fraudulent claims of housing benefit and the total amount of housing benefit fraud; and what joint initiatives he has undertaken with the Department of Social Security on the matter. [29970]

Mr. Maclean: It is not possible from the information held centrally by my Department to identify offences relating to fraudulent claims of housing benefit from other summary offences.

There are no joint initiatives between the Home Office and the Department of Social Security on this matter.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has evaluated of links between organised crime and systematic abuse of the housing benefit system. [30450]

Mr. Maclean: Organised criminals have been involved in serious fraud against the benefit system, including housing benefit. The National Criminal Intelligence Service and the police are working closely with other agencies to identify and tackle this type of crime.

Police Morale

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the morale of Britain's police officers. [30451]

Mr. Maclean: Morale is high, and will continue to improve as a consequence of the Government's effective policies to combat crime and deter criminals, and the continued significant investment in the police service.

Domestic Burglaries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the clear-up rate of recorded domestic burglaries in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands for each year since 1990; and for each year what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30647]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. Figures for the west midlands are given in the table.

Clear-up rate for offences of burglary in a dwelling recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Clear-up rate (percentage)	Percentage point change on previous year	Percentage point change over 1990
1990	39	[1]—	[1]—
1991	31	–8	–8
1992	24	–7	–15
1993	31	+7	–8
1994	32	+1	–7
1995	38	+6	–1

[1] Not applicable.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average value of items stolen in recorded domestic house break-ins in 1995 in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands. [30648]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information for the west midlands is for 1994. For offences of burglary in a dwelling where property was stolen, the average value was £1,054.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded domestic burglaries there were in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year, what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30659]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information for the west midlands is given in the table.

Offences of burglary in a dwelling recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Number of offences	Percentage change on previous year	Percentage change over 1990
1990	35,613	[1]—	[1]—
1991	41,624	+17	+17
1992	52,202	+25	+47
1993	51,815	–1	+45
1994	48,241	–7	+35
1995	46,368	–4	+30

[1] Not applicable.

Private Investigators

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use his Department has made of private detective agencies or investigators during 1995–96 and 1994–95; what agencies have been employed; for what purposes; and at what cost to his Department. [30561]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office and its agencies did not employ private detective agencies or investigators for detective or investigative work during 1995–96 and 1994–95. However, during 1995–96, three companies were employed by the Prison Service to carry out pre-occupation searches of establishments following construction work etc. It is understood that these companies carry out private investigative work for other organisations.

The companies in question are:

Network Security Management

Pinkerton Consultancy and Investigation

Sigma Projects

Payments made to these companies by the Prison Service for search activities during 1995–96 total £188,000.

Car Theft

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the clear-up rate for recorded car theft in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year, what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30655]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information for West Midlands is given in the table.

Clear-up rate for offences of theft of a vehicle recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Clear up rate (percentage)	Percentage point change on previous year	Percentage point change over 1990
1990	35	[1]—	[1]—
1991	30	–5	–5
1992	25	–5	–10
1993	25	—	–10
1994	21	–4	–14
1995	20	–1	–15

[1] Not applicable.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cars were recorded as stolen in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year, what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30654]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information for the west midlands is given in the table.

Offences of theft of a vehicle recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Number of offences	Percentage change on previous year	Percentage change over 1990
1990	34,236	[1]—	[1]—
1991	41,415	+21	+21
1992	39,632	–4	+16
1993	40,184	+1	+17
1994	40,347	—	+18
1995	45,102	+12	+32

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car break-ins were recorded in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year, what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30656]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information relates to offences of theft of and from a motor vehicle and figures for the west midlands are given in the table.

Offences of theft of and from a vehicle recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Number of offences	Percentage change on previous year	Percentage change over 1990
1990	84,321	[1]—	—
1991	95,775	+14	+14
1992	95,881	—	+14
1993	94,925	–1	+13
1994	90,061	–5	+7
1995	95,596	+6	+13

[1] Not applicable.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average value of items recorded as stolen from cars in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands for the latest available year.[30658]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information for the west midlands is for 1994. For offences of theft from a motor vehicle where property was stolen, the average value was £279.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average age of people convicted of *(a)* car theft and *(b)* burglary in the west midlands in the latest year for which statistics are available. [30649]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1994 on the number of offenders convicted at all courts in the West Midlands police force area by age is given in the table.

Data for 1995 will not be available until the autumn.

Number of persons convicted at all courts of (a) car theft and (b) burglary offences in the West Midlands police force area by age, 1994

Age	Car theft[1]	Burglary		
		Domestic burglary	Non-domestic burglary	Total burglary
10	—	—	—	—
11	1	5	2	7
12	9	4	10	14
13	25	18	19	37
14	73	32	29	61
15	99	70	61	131
16	127	79	73	152
17	157	129	99	228
18	172	93	104	197
19	101	91	117	208
20	105	68	90	158
21 and under 25	235	194	258	452
25 and under 30	[2]94	125	175	300
30 and under 40	62	81	127	208
40 and under 50	21	18	24	42
50 and under 60	3	2	9	11
60 and over	1	—	—	—
All ages	1,280	1,009	1,197	2,206

[1] Car theft includes the indictable offences of aggravated vehicle taking—injury to person, damage to property of car; theft from vehicles; theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle car and the summary offences of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking where criminal damage of £2,000 or under.

[2] Includes persons, convicted of summary offences, given the default age of 25 where the exact age was not known.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the clear-up rate of recorded car break-ins in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and for each year, what was the percentage change on (i) the previous year and (ii) 1990. [30657]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. The available information relates to offences of theft of and from a motor vehicle and figures for the west midlands are given in the table.

Clear-up rate for offences of theft of and from a motor vehicle recorded by the police in the west midlands

Year	Clear-up rate (percentage)	Percentage point change on previous year	Percentage point change over 1990
1990	34	—	—
1991	26	–8	–8
1992	22	–4	–12
1993	21	–1	–13
1994	19	–2	–15
1995	18	–1	–16

[1] Not applicable.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of recorded crimes in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in 1979. [30650]

Mr. Maclean: Information for Coventry is not collected centrally. There were 156,671 recorded offences in the west midlands in 1979.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of recorded crimes in each year since 1990; and for each year what was the percentage change on *(a)* the previous year and *(b)* 1990. [30651]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in England and Wales

Year	Number of offences	Percentage change on previous year	Percentage change over 1990
1990	4,543,611	[1]—	[1]—
1991	5,276,173	+16	+16
1992	5,591,717	+6	+23
1993	5,526,255	–1	+22
1994	5,249,478	–5	+16
1995	5,123,638	–2	+13

[1] Not applicable.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have left the employment of Group 4 at Buckley Hall since the prison opened. [30677]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 5 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the numbers of staff who have left the employment of Group 4 at Buckley Hall prison since it opened.

Since the prison opened there have been twenty eight resignations and two redundancies.

Trooping of the Colour

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will request *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* Buckingham palace authorities to move the trooping of the colour ceremony on 15 June to 16 June to avoid a clash with the England *v* Scotland Euro 96 cup match at Wembley. [31026]

Mr. Maclean: Arrangements for both events, including appropriate security measures, are far advanced and I am confident that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner will allocate resources in the most appropriate way in order to ensure that any problems of crime and disorder in London will be dealt with.

Prison Escapes

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* escapes and *(b)* attempted escapes there have been at each male category C prison since 14 December 1994. [30807]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 5 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many (a) escapes; and (b) attempted escapes there have been at each male category C prison since 14 December 1994.

The following table shows the position as at 18 May 1996.

KPI escapes and attempted escapes from category C establishments
14 December 1994 to 18 May 1996

Establishment	*Escapes from establishments*	*Attempted escapes from establishments*
North		
Acklington	Nil	3
Ashwell	1	6
Brockley	Nil	Nil
Buckley Hall	5	4
Everthorpe	Nil	Nil
Featherstone	Nil	Nil
Haverigg	Nil	4
Kirklevington	Nil	Nil
Lancaster	1	1
Lindholme	1	12
Ranby	8	10
Risley	2	Nil
Stafford	2	3
Stocken	2	2
Wealstun (C)	Nil	2
Whatton	Nil	Nil
Wymott	Nil	Nil
South		
Aldington	7	1
Blantyre House	Nil	1
Camp Hill	Nil	3
Channings Wood	Nil	3
Coldingley	1	Nil
Downview	1	Nil
Erlestoke	5	Nil
Guys Marsh	Nil	1
Highpoint	Nil	2
Latchmere House	Nil	Nil

KPI escapes and attempted escapes from category C establishments
14 December 1994 to 18 May 1996

Establishment	*Escapes from establishments*	*Attempted escapes from establishments*
Littlehey	4	1
The Mount	Nil	1
Oxford	1	Nil
Send	1	Nil
Shepton Mallet	Nil	1
Usk/Prescoed	Nil	1
The Verne	7	4
Wayland	Nil	Nil
Wellingborough	2	1
Haslar	3	Nil

Civil Defence Grant

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total expenditure in 1996–97 approved as eligible for civil defence grant aid for *(a)* London FCDA, *(b)* Hounslow London borough, *(c)* Newham London borough, *(d)* Hull unitary authority, *(e)* North Lincoln unitary authority, *(f)* North East Lincoln unitary authority and *(g)* East Riding of Yorkshire unitary authority. [31087]

Mr. Sackville: The information is as follows:

	£
London fire and civil defence authority	388,000
Hounslow London borough council	35,000
Newham London borough council	35,000
East Riding unitary authority	266,000
Hull unitary authority	East Riding acts as host authority
North Lincolnshire	East Riding acts as host authority
North East Lincolnshire	East Riding acts as host authority

Sexual Offences Against Children

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners convicted of sexual offences against children were re-convicted for a sexual offence against a child within two years of their discharge from prison in each year since 1980 for which figures are available. [30783]

Miss Widdecombe: Offenders who are convicted of sexual offences against a child can be charged with any one of a number of offences. The legal categories of sexual offence do not always differentiate between child and adult victims. This means that the information requested is not centrally available.

Driving Offences

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average fine levied for drivers in the last year who *(a)* do not have insurance and *(b)* have not stopped after an accident; what assessment he has made of the desirability of a review of the penalties for such offences; and if he will make a statement. [31163]

Mr. Maclean: The average fine imposed for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks at all courts in England and Wales in 1994—the latest year for which figures are available—was £209. For the offence of failing to stop after an accident it was £133.

For both offences the maximum fine is £5,000, accompanied by obligatory licence endorsement and discretionary disqualification. In addition, for failing to stop after an accident, a sentence of up to six months' imprisonment can be imposed. The Government are satisfied that these penalties adequately reflect the seriousness of the two offences, but remain committed to keeping all penalties under review to ensure that they remain appropriate.

Mr. Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in each of the last five years there have been where a motorist is found not to have the legal insurance required. [31164]

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to the number of findings of guilt for using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks in England and Wales, and is as follows:

Findings of guilt for using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks in England and Wales

Year	*Number*
1990	209,463
1991	225,910
1992	246,054
1993	281,136
1994	286,252

Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1996–97 cash and running costs limits within his responsibilities. [31593]

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised and supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class VII, vote 1—Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales—will be decreased by £14,447,000 from £4,611,752,000 to £4,597,305,000 and the cash limit on class VII, vote 2—prisons, England and Wales—will be increased by £589,000 from £1,521,081,000 to £1,521,670,000. This decrease in the cash limit for vote 1 is the net effect of transfers to the Department for National Heritage, the Cabinet Office and the Prison Service Agency, class VII, vote 2. The increase in provision for vote 2 is the net effect of the delegation from Home Office central services, class VII, vote 1, of office support services, reclassification of some refunds of value added tax for business activity and of the running cost element of the Parole Board's costs when it becomes an executive non-departmental body.

The Home Office running cost limit will be decreased by £584,000 from £1,802,065,000 to £1,801,481,000.

Passport Agency

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the United Kingdom Passport Agency performed against its targets in 1995–96; and what performance targets he has set for the agency in 1996–97. [27769]

Mr. Kirkhope *[pursuant to his reply, 30 April 1996, column 431]:* I am pleased to say that the United Kingdom Passport Agency achieved all its targets in 1995–96. The targets for processing properly completed straightforward applications were met despite a 20 per cent. increase in demand for passport services with an average turnround time for the whole year of 6.1 working days, well within the average target of seven working days. The Passport Agency's financial target was to reduce its unit cost by 5 per cent. in real terms. The latest indications are that the agency has achieved a 7.25 per cent. real terms reduction in its unit cost. Another notable achievement was the re-award of the Chartermark in December 1995.

During 1996–97, I shall expect the Passport Agency to continue to improve its standard of service to the public, while seeking further efficiency savings in its operations.

I have set the agency the following key targets:

1. to process properly completed straightforward applications within a maximum of 15 working days between April and October 1996, and 10 working days from 1 November 1996 onwards.
2. to reduce unit costs by a further 3 per cent. in real terms in comparison with the outturn for 1995–96.

The chief executive will remain directly accountable to me for the performance of the Passport Agency. An advisory board, including two private sector members with experience of delivering services to the public, will continue to provide me with an independent assessment of the agency's performance.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *20*, how many *(a)* unconditional on-demand bonds, *(b)* performance bonds, *(c)* parent company guarantees, *(d)* advance payment bonds and *(e)* retention bonds were required by his Department in the last five years. [31235]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The information required to answer this question is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to the Metropolitan police of kennelling dogs detained under the terms of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in each year since 1991. [31075]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The following is the information requested:

£

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Kennelling	1,263,763	773,469	443,646	368,000
Veterinary	66,075	77,418	57,829	47,000
Total	1,329,838	850,887	501,475	[1]415,000

[1] Estimated costs.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

China

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions her Department had with the Chinese Minister for the State Family Planning Commission during her visit to Britain on 17 and 18 May on *(a)* the male to female birth ratio and *(b)* covert abortions and sterilisations in China; [30758]

(2) what assurances were sought from the Chinese Minister for the State Family Planning Commission during her recent visit to Britain that there would be a halt to coercive birth control policies in Tibet and China. [31092]

Mr. Hanley: In her meeting with Mrs. Peng Peiyun, Chinese State Councillor with responsibilities that include family planning, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey discussed UK concerns about human rights abuses, such as forced sterilisations and abortions, in the implementation of Chinese family planning policy. In order that such informal contacts continue to be constructive, ODA believes that it is not appropriate to release details of these discussions.

HIV and AIDS Funding

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which United Kingdom based non-governmental organisations have been allocated funding for HIV and AIDS programmes for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [30229]

Mr. Hanley: UK-based NGOs receiving funding for specified HIV/AIDS programmes in developing countries 1993–94 to 1995–96 are as follows:

1993–94

Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)
Action Aid
Appropriate Health Resources and Technology Action Group (AHRTAG)
African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF)
Associated Country Women of the World
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CARE–UK
Christian Aid
Health Aid Moyo
International HIV/AIDS Alliance
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Marie Stopes International
Oxfam
Panos Institute
Plan International
Save the Children Fund
United Kingdom Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific

1994–95

Action Aid
Appropriate Health Resources and Technology Action Group (AHRTAG)
African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF)
Associated Country Women of the World
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CARE–UK
Christian Aid
Concern
Concern Universal
International Childcare Trust
International Children's Trust
International Family Health
International HIV/AIDS Alliance
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Marie Stopes International
National Network of Body Positive Groups
Oxfam
Panos Institute
Plan International
Save the Children Fund
Tear Fund
United Kingdom Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific

1995–96

Action Aid
Appropriate Health Resources and Technology Action Group (AHRTAG)
African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF)
Associated Country Women of the World
CARE
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
Christian Aid
Concern
Concern Universal
International Childcare Trust
International Children's Trust
International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS
International Family Health
International HIV/AIDS Alliance
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Medicines Sans Frontieres–UK
Marie Stopes International
Oxfam
Plan International
Population Concern
Save the Children Fund
Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)
Tear Fund
Uganda AIDS Action Fund
Urban Aid
World Vision

Many other UK NGOs receive funds to implement community development and health programmes which will influence the well-being of people exposed to or affected by HIV.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the £39.3 million allocated specifically for HIV/AIDS in 1995–96 was distributed through *(a)* multilateral agencies, *(b)* bilateral agencies and *(c)* non-governmental organisations. [30230]

Mr. Hanley: The table gives a breakdown of the £39.3 million allocated to HIV/AIDS–related activities in 1995–96 by spending channel.

Spending channel	*HIV/AIDS spend £ million*	*Per cent. of spend*
Bilateral	33.815	86.0
Multilateral	5.035	12.8
Non-governmental organisations	0.450	1.2
Total expenditure	39.3	100.0

In addition, a significant number of reproductive health projects approved during this period include prevention of HIV transmission as one of several objectives.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Exports and Imports

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the value of *(a)* exports from and *(b)* imports to Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for which figures are complete. [30828]

Mr. Ancram: Statistics on Northern Ireland's exports are currently available only for the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 and are provided. These are taken from a survey undertaken on behalf of the Department of Economic Development and the Industrial Development Board by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre and published on 1 May 1996.

Statistics on imports to Northern Ireland are not available.

Year	*Exports £ million (excluding sales to GB)*
1991–92	1,784
1992–93	1,980
1993–94	2,175
1994–95	2,637

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which standards which apply to the provision of nursery education will be relaxed under the voucher scheme. [30476]

Mr. Ancram: I do not propose to relax any standards applying to the provision of nursery education.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of children who will qualify for nursery vouchers and *(b)* the lengths of time they will be qualified. [30481]

Mr. Ancram: I estimate that approximately 19,500 children annually will be eligible for a voucher. The length of time for which they will be eligible will depend on the date of their fourth birthday. For planning purposes we have assumed the following distribution:

Three terms: 4,400 children

Two terms: 8,600 children

One term: 6,500 children

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many inspectors are competent and qualified to investigate provision under the nursery voucher scheme; and what proposals he has to increase these numbers. [30482]

Mr. Ancram: At present five inspectors of the Department of Education's inspectorate are competent and qualified to inspect provision under the nursery voucher scheme.

Arrangements are being made for the recruitment of up to five additional specialist inspectors of pre-school education.

Pre-five Services

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he collates on the provision on *(a)* public and *(b)* private provision of pre-five services apart from those in state nursery schools and nursery classes. [30480]

Mr. Moss: The Department of Health and Social Services collates information on the number of day nursery, play group and child-minding places available in public facilities provided by health and social services boards and private facilities registered with health and social services trusts.

At 31 March 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, the position was as follows:

Type of facility	*Number of premises*	*Average available places*
Day nursery		
Public	4	81
Private	104	3,083
Total	108	3,164
Play group		
Public	10	270
Private	624	15,539
Total	634	15,809
Child-minding		
Private	4,225	16,564

School Meals

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to improve the nutritional value of schools meals since receiving the report of the school meals project in December 1995; and if he will make a statement on his proposals for future action. [30477]

Mr. Ancram: Following consultation with the Department of Health and Social Services and the Health Promotion Agency, the Department of Education has accepted that the existing nutritional guidelines for school meals should be reviewed having regard to the guidelines issued by the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy. A working group has been set up to take this review forward. The Department for Education and Employment is in the process of preparing voluntary nutritional guidelines for school meals in England and

Wales and the working group will be liaising closely with DfEE to ensure that all available information is taken into account before final guidelines are issued.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for education expenditure under the private finance initiative. [30478]

Sir John Wheeler: Two PFI projects for the provision of new accommodation at the North West Institute for Higher and Further Education and for the development of a new visitors centre at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum have been advertised in the *Official Journal* of the European Community. The Department of Education is also considering projects under the PFI for schools, other further eduction colleges, higher education institutions, libraries and its periphery activities.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the numbers involved in the youth training scheme, the completion rate, the qualifications achieved and the numbers who are in or moved on to full-time work. [30379]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 5 June 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question.

In the year ended 31 March 1996, a total of 10,543 young people aged 16 and 17 years entered the Agency's Jobskills training programme which was introduced in Northern Ireland on 3 April 1995 to replace the Youth Training and Job Training Programmes. During that period 3,534 left without completing their programme, of whom 1,620 (46%) entered employment, full-time education or another form of training.

Training periods in the new programme range from 39 weeks to 156 weeks depending on the occupational area and level of qualification being followed. The large majority of young people did not join the programme until after 30 June 1995, the single school leaving date in Northern Ireland. More than 90% of the trainees are in training programmes lasting 52 weeks ore more and will not complete their training until 30 June 1996 at the earliest. Information on completion rates, qualifications achieved and numbers of trainees moving into employment will be available in due course.

However, I can provide data from the Jobskills pilot programme which operated in two areas of Northern Ireland from 1 September 1992 to 31 March 1995. A total of 7,311 people, including 4,417 young people started training in the pilot programmes. In excess of 50% of those who joined these programmes achieved a full National Vocational Qualification at Level 2 or above. To date, 68% of those who left the pilot programmes have found employment.

The figures for residual trainees in the Youth Training Programme for the year ended 31 March 1996 show that 29.8% of leavers achieved a NVQ at Level 2 or above. 7,089 young people left the programme during this period of whom 3,312 (65%) entered employment and 210 (4%) full-time education.

I hope you find this helpful.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the 1996–97 running costs limit for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. [31798]

Sir John Wheeler: The gross running cost limit for 1996–97 for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is £787,695,000. Details of the provision for individual Northern Ireland Departments are set out in the Northern Ireland estimates published today and are available in the Library.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's policy on the use of performance bonds; in what circumstances they are used; what was the total sum paid by bond in each of the last five years; and if his Department requires bonds from businesses with fewer than *(a)* 100, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 20 employees. [29500]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 20 May 1996]:* The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments' policy on the use of performance bonds is in accordance with HM Treasury central unit on procurement's guidance on bonds and guarantees.

The potential exists for demanding performance bonds in the allocation of construction contracts. The facility has been used by the Department of the Environment's roads service, which requests performance bonds for all contracts costing £200,000 or more which are awarded by open contract. For contracts less than £200,000, bonds may be requested where there is concern about the capacity of the lowest tenderers to perform the contracts. The roads service has had no occasion to receive payments by bond in the last five years.

The number of staff employed by businesses is not a factor in deciding whether a bond is necessary.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the capacity of incinerators in the United Kingdom to dispose of culled cattle. [30412]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced in the House on 16 April that cull cows would be rendered and the resultant material disposed of by the best practical environmental option. At present there are 10 incinerators approved to burn suspect BSE cases, with an estimated capacity of 40,000 carcases per annum. Some of the limited spare capacity available in these incinerators is being used to be dispose of casualty over 30-month animals which are slaughtered on-farm.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the alternatives his Department has assessed other than incineration, for the disposal of culled cattle, indicating the reasons for their rejection. [30413]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 21 May 1996]:* The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced in the House on 16 April, *Official Report,* columns *513-16,* that cattle over 30 months would be rendered and the resultant material disposed of by the best practical environmental option. The Government have since been working intensively with the trade to examine means of disposal of the material derived from rendered carcases. A number of options for the eventual disposal of meat and bonemeal are under active consideration and in all cases full weight will be given to protection of the environment. These options include incineration, use as fuel in power generation and eventual landfill.

Agriculture Council

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Luxembourg on 3 and 4 June; and if he will make a statement. [31740]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture Council on 3 and 4 June in Luxembourg. I was accompanied by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office, and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office.

The Council considered the proposal by the Commission to lift the EU-wide export ban on United Kingdom produced gelatine, tallow and bull semen. This proposal had failed to attract a qualified majority in the EU Standing Veterinary Committee on 20 May, and the Commission therefore submitted it to the Council for a decision. The proposal was supported in the Council by nine member states but as this did not amount to a qualified majority, the Agriculture Commissioner announced that the Commission would implement the proposal under its own powers. It is likely that this will take effect from 10 June.

I presented to the Agriculture Council the United Kingdom's comprehensive eradication programme for BSE, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. I expect that the programme will be examined in detail by EU veterinary experts in the near future.

The Council also discussed a proposal from the Commission to increase the payments to EU beef producers by way of top-ups to the 1995 beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes in order to give some urgent income support to those affected by the BSE crisis. The proposal envisages in addition an allocation of Community funds to member states, based on the size of the national beef herd, to provide further assistance to beef producers according to national priorities. The proposal also provides for an increase in the age limit for calves brought forward under the calf processing scheme. Ministers in the Council welcomed the Commission's proposal, though recognised that, pending an opinion from the European Parliament, it could not be formally adopted. It will be discussed further at the Agriculture Council meeting on 24 and 25 June.

The Presidency also undertook further bilateral contacts with member states on the reform of the EU fruit and vegetable regime. It is expected that, in the light of these discussions, a compromise proposal will be put before the late June Agriculture Council meeting.

Set-aside Land

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he proposes to implement the EU Commission regulation authorising the United Kingdom to permit cattle aged over 30 months to graze on set-aside land. [31741]

Mr. Baldry: I welcome the Commission's agreement to our request to allow cattle to graze set-aside land in view of the difficulties currently facing our cattle farmers. The relevant Commission regulation, which is expected to come into force shortly and will run until 31 August, requires the United Kingdom authorities to take the measures necessary to ensure that only cattle aged over 30 months are permitted to graze set-aside and that the existing rules restricting lucrative use of set-aside land are observed. We shall therefore be laying before Parliament a statutory instrument subject to negative resolution procedure which will require those farmers wishing to take advantage of this facility to return a simple form to their agriculture departments. The instrument will also enable authorised persons to inspect cattle on set-aside land to ensure compliance with the regulations.

Producers may allow another farmer's cattle to graze their set-aside, but they may not receive any payment in cash or kind for the use of the set-aside as grazing.

We will be writing to all cattle farmers early next week explaining how they can take advantage of this provision. Farmers should not begin to graze cattle on set-aside until receipt of their notification form has been acknowledged by their agriculture departments as to do so would jeopardise set-aside payments and associated crop area aid payments.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to his Department's running costs and cash limits for 1996–97. [31831]

Mr. Baldry: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for the Intervention Board Executive Agency (class III vote 1 section B) will be increased by £9,388,00 from £47,429,000 to £56,817,000. The increases are to cover the administration costs associated with the implementation of emergency measures to protect against bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the United Kingdom. Capital will be increased by £370,000 to £1,979,000 and agents' services by £6,715,000 to £18,427,000.

The running cost cash limit for the Intervention Board executive agency will be increased by £2,303,000 from £34,515,000 to £36,818,000 to reflect the additional costs of operating BSE measures in the UK.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 2—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: departmental research, advisory services and administration, executive agencies and certain other services—will be increased by £206,700,000 from £704,618,000 to £911,318,000. The £206,700,000 all

relates to additional responsibilities arising in response to the BSE crisis. The gross running costs limit for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be increased by £50,066,000 from £304,702,000 to £354,768,000.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SCOTLAND

Vandalism and Burglary (Shops)

19. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to protect shopkeepers and shops in Scottish cities and towns from vandalism and burglary. [30090]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Two key steps are "Operation Shopkeep", which is a campaign specifically against crime facing small shopkeepers, and our £4 million closed circuit television challenge competition, which will extend closed circuit television to more communities in Scotland.

Housing, Glasgow

20. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whn he intends to meet Glasgow city council to discuss housing conditions. [30092]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I last met representatives of Glasgow city council on 21 March 1996 to discuss housing. In addition, I met a number of hon. Members representing Glasgow constituencies on 14 February to discuss housing matters.

Education Assistance

21. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance he can give to ensure that children aged 16 years or over are not discouraged from staying on in full-time education. [30093]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: We are already developing a new system of courses and assessment, Higher Still, to give all young people from age 16 the opportunity to study and gain relevant qualifications to the highest standard they can reach.

Financial support is available for this age group through child benefit and bursaries amounting to over £91 million.

Primary Schools

22. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the figure in 1978–79 at constant prices. [30094]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Current expenditure per primary pupil in 1993–94 was £1,773. That is 58 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1978–79.

Party Conferences

23. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who is responsible for meeting the cost of security for political party conferences. [30095]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under section 170 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 my right hon. Friend may contribute towards the cost of security at each qualifying party's main annual conference. Policing costs incurred on all party conferences are met from the budget of the police authority or joint board concerned, with the assistance of police specific grant, normally at 51 per cent. of the budget, from the Scottish Office.

Inward Investment

26. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to attract inward investment to Scotland. [30098]

Mr. Kynoch: Locate in Scotland will continue to promote Scotland's advantages as a business location, working in partnership with the local enterprise companies and other bodies in both the public and private sectors. Its resources will be targeted on those markets which generate the strongest flows of outward investment and where Scotland's competitive strengths make it an attractive location.

28. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of Scottish inward investment on Scotland's economy. [30100]

Mr. Kynoch: Inward investment has been—and continues to be—a very important element in the Scottish economy. Not only does it create new jobs but it helps introduce new technologies and new management practices, generates wealth, contributes significantly to our exports and creates opportunities for subcontractors and suppliers, many of which are indigenous companies.

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about inward investment into Scotland. [30103]

Mr. Kynoch: 1995–96 was another very successful year for inward investment in Scotland. Locate in Scotland and the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department helped to attract to Scotland 84 inward investment projects involving planned investment of nearly £1 billion and the expected creation or safeguarding of over 12,500 jobs.

Homelessness

27. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of homeless people in Scotland in 1996; and what was the equivalent figure in 1986. [30099]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In 1994–95, the most recent year for which figures are available, 25,100 households were assessed as homeless by Scottish local authorities following applications under the homeless persons legislation. The corresponding figure for 1986–87 was 10,600.

Nursery Education

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children aged three to five years are currently in education; at what cost; what were the equivalent figures in *(a)* 1976 and *(b)* 1986; and if he will make a statement. [30102]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: At September 1994, the total number of children in education in Scotland aged three to five years, inclusive, was 125,720. The equivalent figures for 1976 and 1986 were 118,455 and 117,428 respectively. Information on costs is not available in the form requested.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

31. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the Scottish beef industry; and if he will make a statement. [30104]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for agriculture, forestry and environment have received many representations about the state of the Scottish beef industry from all sectors, including the National Farmers Union, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the Auctioneers Association, Transport haulier associations, individual companies and farmers affected by the BSE crisis.

33. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement regarding compensation to those companies which have lost business in the meat industry. [30106]

Mr. Robertson: The Government have not sought to provide compensation for any individual or company that has lost business. The package of measures introduced is designed to provide support to the vital parts of the beef chain to help restore consumer confidence, and to get the whole sector moving again.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *129*, on the incidences of BSE within East Kilbride and Lanarkshire, when he plans to place the information requested in the Library. [31229]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The information was placed in the Library of the House on 23 May 1996.

Tenants' Rights

32. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on tenants' rights; and if he will make a statement. [30105]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government are committed to protecting and strengthening the rights of tenants through legislation and through the implementation of the commitments made in the tenants charter for Scotland.

National Health Service

34. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reduce bureaucracy in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [30107]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: NHS trusts and health boards in Scotland have been asked to reduce their administration costs by at least 5 per cent. in 1996–97 and to contain their total management costs to £10 per head of weighted population in 1997–98. This is expected to release around £25 million a year for investment in patient care.

Local Government Finance

16. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the benefits of the current block grant system for the public finances in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [30087]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The block and formula arrangements have resulted in a spending level over 35 per cent. higher per head than England.

35. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average expenditure per head by local authorities in Scotland in 1995–96; and what was the United Kingdom average figure. [30108]

Mr. Kynoch: Comprehensive outturn data for 1995–96 are not yet available. However, on the basis of budgeted expenditure data, the relevant Scottish figure is £1,270 and that for Great Britain is £970. A figure for the UK as a whole would not be meaningful because local authorities in Northern Ireland provide a far narrower range of services.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his review of local authority spending. [30101]

Mr. Kynoch: Our current timetable is to award a contract, or contracts, for the study of local government current expenditure later this month. We hope that the study will be completed by the end of the year and that the results will inform a more rational debate about the levels of local authority expenditure.

Health and Social Services

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an official visit to the Scottish borders to discuss health and social services. [30089]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I would be very happy to receive an invitation to do so.

Scottish Record Office

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the targets he expects the Scottish Record Office to achieve in 1996–97. [31594]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have set the Scottish Record Office the following key targets for 1996–97:

- to reduce the unit cost of preserving and making available the records of Scotland by 10 per cent. in real terms;
- to increase the number of catalogue entries available for public scrutiny on the electronic system by 46,000;
- to produce material for readers in 92.5 per cent. of cases in 30 minutes or less for material from the same building and in two days or less for material from elsewhere;
- to answer 85 per cent. of correspondence within 10 days, absorbing up to a 2 per cent. increase in demand; and
- to publish the "Guide to the Records of Scotland".

Pensioners (Home Ownership)

36. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated number of senior citizens who are home owners in Scotland. [30109]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Almost 241,000 household heads of pensionable age were identified as owner occupiers in the 1991 census of population, the latest date for which complete information is available.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1996–97 within his responsibility. [31596]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, I intend to make changes to three voted cash limits and two non-voted cash blocks.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 2, local government, housing, transport, other environmental services and European funds, Scotland, will be increased by £23,075,000 from £5,545,508,000 to £5,568,583,000. The increase will be offset by savings of £12,000,000 from cash limit Scottish Office European regional development fund; £5,000,000 from cash limit SO/LA1 and £6,075,000 from class XIII, vote 3.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 3, education, industry, arts, and libraries, Scotland, will be reduced by £6,075,000 from £1,602,605,000 to £1,596,530,000. The reduced cash limit takes account of the transfer of £75,000 to class XIII, vote 2, in respect of consultancies in relation to European Community structural funds and the transfer of £6,000,000 to class XIII, vote 2, in respect of increased support for local authorities. Provision for self-governing schools in respect of annual recurrent grant has been increased by £540,000. This has been offset by a corresponding amount taken as appropriations in aid.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 5, law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland will be decreased by £810,000 from £625,209,000 to £624,399,000. This reduction takes account of a transfer of £500,000 to the non-voted SO/LA1 cash limit to meet the costs of a Scottish DNA database; and a reduction of £310,000 in police capital grant. The reduction in the grant will result in a corresponding increase in net capital allocations.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, will be decreased by £4,500,000 from £431,120,000 to £426,620,000. This reflects a reduction of £5,000,000 transferred to class XIII, vote 2 and an increase of £500,000 transferred from class XIII, vote 5.

The non-voted cash limit SO/ERDF which covers European regional development fund payments in Scotland will be decreased by £12,000,000 from £109,079,000 to £97,079,000. This reflects the transfer to class XIII, vote 2.

These increases will be offset by savings and will not therefore added to the total of planned expenditure.

Officials (Meetings)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings have taken place between officials of the Scottish Office and Scottish hon. Members during the past three months without Ministers present. [25771]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 April 1996]:* Officials of the Scottish Office have met hon. Members without Minister present on the following occasions in the last three months:

19 January 1996: The chief executive of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland met the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang).

22 January 1996: Two senior officials from the Education and Industry Department met the hon. Members for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell).

4 April 1996: The chief medical officer met the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

Severe Weather Working Party

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the report of the working party, which he established to review the experiences of the severe weather at the end of 1995, to be published. [31595]

Mr. Kynoch: I have received the severe weather working party's report and have today placed copies of the report in the Library of the House.

Unemployment

24. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on unemployment levels in Scotland. [30096]

Mr. Kynoch: The seasonally adjusted level of unemployment in Scotland has fallen by more than 53,000 since December 1992. The unemployment rate in Scotland is well below the European Union average.

Cairngorms Funicular Railway

25. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call in the planning application for the Cairngorms funicular railway. [30097]

Mr. Kynoch: The relevant considerations remain as described in my reply to the hon. Member on 14 March, *Official Report*, column *730*.

WALES

Mobile Snack Bars

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what objections he had received to the proposal to introduce clearway orders which would result in a trading ban over the length of the A55 in north Wales in respect of mobile snack bars. [31027]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The draft orders have not yet been advertised.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the provision of snack bar facilities in lay-by areas along the A55 in north Wales. [31028]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There have been 14 such representations about the proposed ban on lay-by trading along the A55 trunk road, nine against and five in favour.

Hospital Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to enable hospital doctors to participate in decisions about hospital care; and if he will make a statement. [31003]

Mr. Hague: All NHS hospital services in Wales are provided by NHS trusts. To achieve such status all applicants were required to demonstrate the full involvement in management of their senior professional staff, especially clinical consultants. It is also a statutory requirement that the executive directors of each hospital trust should include a medical practitioner.

UK Forum of Mobility Centres

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further assistance he plans to give the United Kingdom forum of mobility centres to promote and develop its work. [31020]

Mr. Hague: There are no members of the UK forum in Wales. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on Wednesday 14 February, *Official Report*, column *650*.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the gross output of electricity produced from wind turbines in Wales in each year since 1993; and if he will make a statement. [30737]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Electricity generated by wind schemes in Wales in each of the years since 1993 was approximately as follows:

Year	*GWh*
1993	110
1994	167
1995	171

I expect the output to continue to rise year by year as more wind farms come into operation.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of Tai Cymru's annual budget is spent on central administration; and if he will make a statement. [30738]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the current year, I expect Tai Cymru's administration costs to be less than 2 per cent. of its total programme.

Electricity Consumption

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the gross consumption of electricity in Wales in each year since 1993; and if he will make a statement. [30739]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Gross electricity consumption in Wales in each of the financial years since 1993 was as follows:

Year	*GWh*
1992–93	16,363
1993–94	16,589
1994–95	15,869

Eisteddfodau

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation he has made of the attraction to tourists of the annual international eisteddfod at Llangollen; and if he will make a statement. [30741]

Mr. Hague: The Wales tourist board has made no evaluation of the international eisteddfod specifically as a tourist attraction.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation he has made of the attraction to tourists of the *(a)* annual national eisteddfod and *(b)* national Urdd eisteddfod; and if he will make a statement. [30743]

Mr. Hague: The national eisteddfod and Urdd national eisteddfod are important culture festivals which annually attract upwards of 150,000 and 80,000 visitors respectively. It has been estimated that the national eisteddfod brings over £3 million to the local economy of the area it visits.

Vaccination and Immunisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children have been vaccinated in schools as part of the school health service; and if he will make a statement. [30742]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not collected in this format.

Pontypool Bypass

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the name of the contractor currently working on the Pontypool bypass; and if financial penalty clauses were included in the contract. [30808]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Shepherd Hill Civil Engineers Ltd. is the contractor for the A4042 Cwmbran roundabout improvement.

The contract allows for liquidated damages to be applied in the normal way for late completion.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when roadworks on the Pontypool bypass, A4042, will be completed. [30979]

Mr. Jones: The roadworks on the A4042 Cwmbran roundabout are currently scheduled to finish on 15 June 1996.

Prostate Cancer Screening

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve prostate cancer screening; and if he will make a statement. [30780]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans at present to introduce a NHS screening programme for prostate cancer in Wales. They key aim of any screening programme must be to secure a demonstratable improvement in health by increasing length of life and enhancing quality of life. There is, as yet, no evidence that this would be achieved in relation to prostate cancer. Although screening is not routinely available to NHS patients, individual patients can be tested on request. This may be of benefit where there is a family history of the disease.

The Government remain interested in assessing the value of prostate cancer screening programmes.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the age profile and employment status of the current unitary authority councillors in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [30752]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Care and Repair Cymru

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes his Department is evaluating in respect of the existing funding arrangements for Care and Repair Cymru; and if he will make a statement. [30760]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are currently no proposals to change the funding arrangements for Care and Repair Cymru.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Care and Repair Cymru. [30750]

Mr. Jones: Care and Repair Cymru has been developing and monitoring roles for new and existing schemes respectively. Its future roles will be considered in the light of responses to the consultation paper "The Welsh Office and Local Government: Redefining the Relationship" and the plans of local authorities.

Open Heart Surgery

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the present waiting list for open heart surgery in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [30762]

Mr. Hague: About 400 patients are currently waiting for open heart surgery in Wales and will be treated within 12 months.

Dental Services

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps he is taking to safeguard NHS dentistry services in *(a)* Torfaen, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; [30981]

(2) what measures he is taking to increase the number of NHS dentists in Wales; [31006]

(3) what steps he is taking to increase the number of dentists in *(a)* Torfaen, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales. [30982]

Mr. Hague: On 21 September last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) announced details of a £3 million initiative to attract more dentists into Wales. The initiative enabled Welsh health authorities to offer grants of up to £50,000 to attract new dentists into their areas. Grants of £25,000 were available for most parts of the Torfaen area.

By the end of April, nearly £2 million has been offered in grants for:

	Wales	*Gwent*	*Torfaen*
New practices	20	2	1
Existing practices being expanded	12	2	
New community dental service posts	16	3	1

School Inspections

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list *(a)* pre-school, *(b)* primary, *(c)* secondary and *(d)* special school registered inspectors and their teams who are currently involved in school inspections, and, using the same categories, those registered inspectors and their teams who are not currently involved in inspections; [30840]

(2) if he will list the current *(a)* levels and *(b)* types of other full or part-time employment of registered inspectors and their teams, and, in the case of retired inspection personnel, their last paid employment. [30841]

Mr. Hague: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member, and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much additional finance has been provided to teach Welsh as a second language to students of constituent colleges of the university of Wales for each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement. [30747]

Mr. Hague: The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has made the following allocations to the constituent colleges of the university of Wales under its Welsh for adults programme:

1993–94: £304,500

1994–95: £431,600

1995–96: £1,116,255

1996–97: £1,179,500.

Colleges are also able to use the general funding made available to them by the funding council to increase the resources for teaching Welsh to their students. In addition, the allocations in 1993–94 and 1994–95 were supplemented by the colleges from the funding for extra mural activities made available by the funding council.

Comparable information for the period prior to 1993–94 is not available.

Rental Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will take to increase the number of affordable homes for rent; and if he will make a statement. [31004]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Some £85.390 million is being made available during the current year to housing associations enabling the provision of at least 3,500 additional homes, some 80 per cent. of which will be for rent.

Departmental Property

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what properties are owned or leased by his Department for the use of Ministers; what was the total running cost for each property for the latest year available; and if he will make a statement. [30748]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has no properties for the sole use of Ministers. Ministers have rooms in properties in Cardiff and London. The cost of these properties are included in the running cost expenditure published in the Welsh Office departmental report 1996, Cm 3215.

Teachers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time teachers were employed by Welsh local education authorities in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [30749]

Mr. Hague: Information on full-time qualified teachers is given in the following table:

Number of full-time qualified teachers employed by each LEA in Wales[1]

Local education authority	1993[2]		1994[3]		1995	
	Schools[3]	Further education institutions[4]	Schools[3]	Further education institutions[4]	Schools[3]	Further education institutions[4]
Clwyd	3,315	686	3,006	0	2,898	0
Dyfed	3,341	364	3,241	14	3,171	15
Gwent	3,743	414	3,710	8	3,674	7
Gwynedd	2,053	203	1,987	0	1,928	0
Mid Glamorgan	5,138	508	5,078	1	5,138	1
Powys	1,085	118	1,084	2	1,053	2
South Glamorgan	3,537	347	3,347	66	3,404	69
West Glamorgan	3,212	464	3,256	12	3,226	11
Wales	25,424	3,104	24,709	103	24,492	105

Notes:
[1] At January each year.
[2] From 1 April 1993 sixth form colleges and FE colleges became autonomous institutions funded by the Further Education Funding Council for Wales and teachers at these institutions were no longer employed by the local authority.
[3] Includes full-time qualified teachers based in schools, pupil referral units, peripatetic teachers, advisory teachers, teachers providing education otherwise than at school and in 1993 teachers in two sixth form colleges.
[4] Full-time lecturers employed by local authorities to provide further education in adult or community centres, youth clubs and centres, other establishments and in 1993 in FE colleges.
Source: Form 618G.

General Practitioners

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to recruit more general practitioners. [31001]

Mr. Hague: Government policy is to secure an adequate supply of appropriately trained doctors in each sector and specialty, including general practice. This is achieved through advisory and planning mechanisms at a UK and Wales level.

The medical work force standing advisory committee considers the longer-term need for doctors and makes recommendations on the intake of medical schools. In 1995, the committee recommended an increase of 11 per cent. in UK medical school intakes by the year 20000 to a total of 4,970. The Government have accepted that recommendation.

The Welsh Office is involved in UK work force planning through its representation on the advisory group on medical education and staffing. This group is examining the issue of recruitment and retention of GPs. The Welsh Office also has regular discussions with education providers in Wales to ensure that there are appropriate training opportunities to potential GPs.

Home Ownership

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to make mortgages more affordable for young people; and if he will make a statement. [31005]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We already have schemes which make home ownership more affordable for those on lower incomes, including young people, who cannot raise a sufficient mortgage to buy a home of their own. The successful homefinder and homebuy option schemes, operated by councils and housing associations respectively, allow people to buy a home for 70 per cent. of its value. The remaining 30 per cent. is held as a charge on the property and does not have to be repaid until the home is sold.

Rural Railways

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received during the last 12 months on the future of rural railway services; and if he will make a statement. [30746]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Fifteen representations were received in the 12 months ended 30 April 1996.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what progress he is making on the elimination of bureaucracy, waste and maladministration in the conduct of non-departmental public bodies in Wales; and if he will make a statement; [30744]

(2) what new measures he will introduce to make quangos democratically accountable; and if he will make a statement. [30745]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office continues to remind public bodies of the need for the highest standards of propriety in the conduct of public affairs in Wales. We have developed the arrangements previously introduced for monitoring and controlling the performance of public bodies in Wales. This work has meant that the Welsh Office has already been able to put into effect a number of recommendations of the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

My right hon. Friend and I hold regular meetings with each Welsh executive public body to consider targets and performance; and they are provided with clear statements of their responsibilities, the roles of the board and staff and of the Welsh Office. Each pubic body is also expected to adopt, with such adaptations as are appropriate to its circumstances, the code of best practice for board members of public bodies published by HM Treasury in June 1994. This requires public bodies and their boards to:

observe the highest standard of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to their stewardship of public funds;

comply with Government policy on openness and to respond to all reasonable requests for information;

be accountable to Parliament, individual citizens and staff for the activities of the bodies concerned, their stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets have been met;

maximise value of money by ensuring their activities are carried out in the most efficient and economical way.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Travel-to-interview Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people, eligible for assistance under the travel-to-interview scheme, were unemployed for *(a)* longer than four weeks and *(b)* longer than 13 weeks in each year since 1993–94. [30541]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 5 June 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions on how many people, eligible for assistance under the Travel to Interview Scheme (TIS), were employed for longer than four weeks and longer than 13 weeks in each year since 1993–94.

I am unable to provide the information you ask for, as my Jobcentres do not record how long people who apply for TIS have been unemployed. However, in the sample taken for a recent study, 26% of applications were from people unemployed for less than 13 weeks.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what research she has *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* evaluated into the potential benefits to trainees of encouraging TECs to award longer-term contracts to training providers; and if she will make a statement; [31216]

(2) what measures she plans to introduce to encourage TECs to extend longer-term contracts to local, regional and national training providers; and if she will make a statement. [31217]

Mr. Paice: There has been no research specifically into this issue.

The precise nature of training and enterprise councils' contracts with their providers is a matter for individual TECs. However, we hope that the greater stability afforded by three-year TEC licensing arrangements will lead TECs to offer greater stability in turn to their providers. Some TECs are already starting to do so. We will be encouraging others, via the TEC National Council, to also consider the opportunities for this.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Social Affairs Council of 3 June. [31734]

Mr. Forth: I attended the Social Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 3 June.

In the light of the Prime Minister's statement on BSE to the House on 21 May, I was unable to agree to four items on the agenda: a Council recommendation on balanced participation of men and women in decision making; a resolution on the transparency of training certificates; a resolution on a European year against racism; and Council conclusions on a Commission report no the demographic situation. It is likely that, in other circumstances the United Kingdom would have been able to agree to the adoption of these proposals.

An interim report on employment was forwarded to the Florence European Council with no discussion.

There was a short orientation debate on a Commission communication on information and consultation, on which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry leads. I made clear that the UK does not believe that there is any need for legislation in this area, either at national or at European level.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to announce changes to cash limits and running costs on votes within her responsibility for 1996–97. [31739]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class IX, vote 1, Department for Education and Employment; programmes and central services; class IX, vote 3, Employment Service; class IX, vote 4, office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England will be amended as follows:

Class	Vote	Existing cash limit	Change	New cash limit
IX	1	8,751,429,000	–6,484,000	8,744,945,000
IX	3	1,287,560,000	1,417,000	1,288,977,000
IX	4	117,600,000	5,067,000	122,667,000

The cash limit for class IX, vote 1 will be reduced by £6,484,000 from £8,751,429,000 to £8,744,945,000. This is as a result of transfers to Ofsted of £5,055,000 for work in connection with inspection of providers of under-fives education, and £12,000 for the inspection of careers education. An additional £1,500,000 has been transferred to the Employment Service to increase the provision for the access to work programme. This transfer has been partially offset by a transfer of £83,000 from the Employment Service in respect of salary costs of staff transferred from the Employment Service to the Department of Education and Employment.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 3 will be increased by £1,417,000 from £1,287,560,000 to £1,288,977,000. This is the result of a transfer of £1,500,000 from the Department for Education and Employment in respect of additional provision for the access to work programme, which is partially offset by a transfer of £83,000 to the Department for Education and Employment in respect of salary costs of staff transferred from the Employment Service to the Department for Education and Employment.

The running costs provision for class IX, vote 1 will be increased by £83,000 from £366,622,000 to £366,705,000 and the running costs provision for class IX, vote 3 will be decreased by £83,000 from £910,234,000 to £910,151,000. There is no change to the overall DfEE gross running costs limit.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 4 will be increased by £5,067,000 from £117,600,000 to £122,667,000. The running costs limit will be increased by £2,185,000 from £27,429,000 to £29,614,000. These increases are to enable Ofsted to undertake work in connection with the inspection of providers of under-fives education and the inspection of careers education. The increase in the cash limit will be offset by the reduction to the cash limit for class IX, vote 1 mentioned above.

The increases will be offset by savings elsewhere or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the total of planned public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Railway Stations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations have been *(a)* opened and *(b)* re-opened since 1993 on the initiative of (i) local government, (ii) British Rail Railtrack and (iii) central Government. [31130]

Mr. Watts: It is for train operators, and local authorities or passenger transport executives, to decide which stations they wish to open or re-open for the benefit of the local travelling public. Since 1993 14 new stations have been opened and 28 stations have been re-opened as a result of close co-operation between those organisations and British Rail and/or Railtrack. In addition, Waterloo and Ashford International stations were opened by European Passenger Services for international passenger traffic.

Airworthiness

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the countries receiving advice from the Civil Aviation Authority on *(a)* airworthiness and *(b)* other issues. [30493]

Mr. Norris: The following have current agreements for the provision of airworthiness advice by the UK CAA.

Bahrain
Falklands
Cyprus
Hong Kong
Brunei
Fiji
Solomons
Kiribati
Malaysia
Bahamas
Cayman Islands
Jamaica
Turks and Caicos
Belize
Trinidad and Tobago
Guyana
Suriname
British Virgin Islands
Anguilla
Antigua
Dominica
Grenada
Montserrat
St. Christopher and Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
The Grenadines.

In addition, 109 nations have now attended the UK CAA airworthiness course and many others seek advice on an ad hoc basis.

Advice on other aspects of civil aviation regulation, operation and development has been provided to more than 150 countries in the past 25 years.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will initiate an up to date report into the arrangements to undertake the second survey of the MV Derbyshire wreckage field; [31270]

(2) for what reasons his Department has refused to form a formal partnership with the technical advisers to the Derbyshire Families Association. [31271]

Mr. Norris: The return expedition to the wreck of the Derbyshire will take place in two phases. The first phase will be a limited sonar and photographic survey of the wreckage field, to be carried out in late June or early July by Oceaneering Technologies, who undertook the initial

expedition in 1994. It is expected that the main expedition will take place early next year. The Department of Transport and the European Commission are sharing the costs of both phases.

The first phase will involve a detailed survey of the wreckage field with the aim of identifying individual parts of the ship and, in particular, to establish the location and accessibility of the ship's stern. The material collected is intended to assist in the detailed planning of the main expedition.

The purpose of the return to the Derbyshire is to see what lessons can be learnt from the loss of this particular ship which could help avoid future bulker losses and the continuing loss of life such losses involve. Planning and control of both phases rests with the three independent technical assessors. Ministry of Defence officials will act as project managers overseeing the activities of the appointed contractor or contractors.

On completion of the second phases, they will prepare a report on their findings and conclusions which will be submitted to Ministers and the European commission. Their report will be published and, following its completion, the data recovered will be made available to interested parties.

It is possible that this report may lead to the reopening of the formal Investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire and the taking forward of specific safety initiatives through the International Maritime Organisation.

We have given sympathetic consideration to the request from the Derbyshire Families Association that they should be represented on, or have a degree of control over, the return to the ship. We have concluded that this would not be appropriate. The association is one of a number of parties with an interest in the outcome of the return expedition. For one of these parties, but not the others, to be represented on the return expedition could lead to suggestions that the findings lacked balance or objectivity., For all the parties to be represented on the return would be impractical given the nature of the operations to be undertaken. To allow the independent assessors to complete their task, without any risk that they could be considered to have been influenced in any way, it has also been decided that the Department of Transport, Marine Safety Agency and Marine Accident Investigation Branch will not be represented on either phase of the return.

We continue to welcome the advice and involvement of all parties in the planning of the return. The independent technical assessors stand ready to discuss matters with any interested party.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of each technical expert who has been engaged to take part in the second survey of the MV Derbyshire wreckage field. [31272]

Mr. Norris: The following are expected to be on board the survey vessel carrying out phase 1 of the return expedition.

Dr. Remo Torchio: EU technical assessor

Robin Williams: UK technical assessor

Professor Douglas Faulkner; UK technical assessor

Morgyn Davies: Ministry of Defence salvage officer and project manager

Steve Quin: Ministry of Defence, salvage officer.

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits for 1996–97. [31923]

Sir George Young: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised estimate, the cash limit for class V, vote 5 will be amended as follows:

> the cash limit for class V, vote 5—roads and local transport—is reduced by £3,382,000 from £392,962,000 to £389,580,000. The reduction is one of a number of revisions to realign entries in the main estimates with the published local transport settlement.

The Department's local authority capital cash limit covering supplementary credit approvals for local authority spending on public transport programmes will be increased by £3,382,000 from £304,732,000 to £308,114,000, all of which is derived from the transfer from the transport supplementary grant, class V, vote 5.

The increase to the Department's local authority capital cash limit will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Railway Stations (Disabled Parking)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation he has made of the practice at railway stations of charging severely disabled orange badge holders for parking; what is his policy in this regard; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [30228]

Mr. Watts: Car parking charges at railways stations are matters for individual station operators. The Rail Regulator is responsible for protecting the needs of disabled passengers and has required all station operators to produce and comply with a disabled people's protection policy as a condition of their licence. The Rail Regulator will consider taking action if operators introduce any measures which result in a reduction in present levels of access for disabled passengers across the rail network.

Accidents (Failure to Stop)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases in each of the last five years there have been where drivers involved in reported accidents have failed to stop. [31162]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following table. Figures for 1995 should be available in July.

Injury road accidents in Great Britain in which one or more vehicles failed to stop after a collision: 1990–94

Year	*Total reported injury road accidents*	*Injury road accidents in which one or more vehicles failed to stop*	*(b) as a percentage of (a)*
1990	258,441	19,354	7.5
1991	235,798	18,360	7.8
1992	233,025	18,114	7.8

Injury road accidents in Great Britain in which one or more vehicles failed to stop after a collision: 1990–94

Year	Total reported injury road accidents	Injury road accidents in which one or more vehicles failed to stop	(b) as a percentage of (a)
1993	228,865	17,358	7.6
1994	234,101	17,980	7.7

1. Police reports of injury accidents may include vehicles not physically involved in the collision if they are deemed to have contributed to the accident. These vehicles are not included in this analysis, as their drivers may have been unaware of the accident.

Collisions at Sea (Liability)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what international conventions govern liability for *(a)* private shipping and *(b)* Government-owned vessels in cases of accidental collisions with oil industry installations in United Kingdom waters. [31207]

Mr. Norris: There is no international liability and compensation regime that applies specifically to collision damage caused by ships involved in accidental collisions with oil industry installations. Following such a collision, the shipowners may generally limit liability to an amount determined in accordance with the convention on the limitation of liability for maritime claims 1976. There are also two international conventions which could govern the shipowners's liability for damage caused by the ship's cargo following such a collision. The civil liability convention 1992 makes shipowners liable for pollution damage caused by oils spills from tankers, whatever the cause of the spill. When it enters into force, the hazardous and noxious substances convention 1996 would extend the liability of shipowners to damage caused by all hazardous and noxious cargoes carried on ships. All three international conventions apply to all commercially operated ships, whether owned by a private individual, by a private company or by a Government.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Running Costs and Cash Limits

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes she proposes to make to her Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1996–97. [31794]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class X, vote 1 will be increased by £17,519,000 from £931,241,000 to £948,760,000. The increase will be to transfer responsibility for the voluntary services from the Home Office to the Department of National Heritage, and for a building from the Department of Trade and Industry to the British library and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Indemnity Undertakings

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of indemnity undertakings given by Departments under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six-months period ended 31 March 1996 and *(b)* the value of any contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given under that section which remained outstanding as at 31 march. [31795]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

(i) in the six-month period ended 31 March 1996 the following undertakings to indemnify were given by the relevant Departments for items on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Number
Department of National Heritage	452
Scottish Office Education Department	52
Welsh Office Education Department	30
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	12

(ii) the value of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time under section 16 and outstanding at 31 March are:

	£
Department of National Heritage	1,366,004,790
Scottish Office Education Department	75,901,633
Welsh Office Education Department	81,430,000
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	4,186,274

Underwater Archaeological Sites

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects English Heritage to take over responsibility for the protection of underwater archaeological sites. [31015]

Mr. Sproat: The Department published, on 22 May, the consultation paper "Protecting Our Heritage" which includes details of the proposed transfer of underwater archaeology to English Heritage. The proposed transfer will be considered in the light of comments on the Government's proposals. It will require legislation.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what funding her Department provides for the protection of underwater archaeological sites. [31013]

Mr. Sproat: The Department's expenditure on underwater archaeology for 1995–96 was £220,000. This provided for the cost of marking historic wrecks on land and at sea and for the archaeological diving unit based at St. Andrews university to provide advice in relation to wrecks of historical, archaeological, or artistic interest. The Department also meets the costs of the Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites.

In addition, two voluntary organisations were given grants from the Heritage grant fund 1995–96 for underwater archaeology projects. The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology received £16,000 and the Nautical Archaeological Society received £18,000.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many officials in her Department are involved with the protection of underwater archaeological sites. [31014]

Mr. Sproat: Three officials spend part of their time on the protection of underwater archaeological sites. The percentage of time spent by the three officials on underwater archaeology is the equivalent to approximately one full-time member of staff.

Angling

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what responsibility her Department has for the funding of angling. [31011]

Mr. Sproat: My Department does not fund any sports directly. The majority of Government money specifically allocated to sport and active recreation is channelled through the Sports Council. While operating within a policy framework set by Government, the Sports Council has a degree of independence under its royal charter. In 1994–95, Sports Council grants to the governing bodies of angling totalled £54,125. The Department also funds Sportsmatch, the business sponsorship incentive scheme, which provided £42,250 in awards for angling schemes in 1994–95.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will estimate the additional cost of reducing the level of the colour TV licence fee to the same level as the black and white TV licence fee for pensioners in receipt of means-tested state support; [30839]

(2) what plans she has to increase the concessions available to retired people for colour television licences. [30838]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have no plans to extend the existing concessionary television licence scheme. This would lead to a reduction in television licence revenue, on which the BBC depends for its home broadcasting grant. To make good the shortfall, we would have to increase the licence fee for all other licence payers, regardless of their means. The additional cost of providing colour licences at £30—the current black and white licence fee—for all pensioners in receipt of one or more means tested benefit would be approximately £165 million.

White Paper

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she now expects to publish a Heritage White Paper. [31012]

Mr. Sproat: The consultation document, "Protecting Our Heritage" was published on 22 May. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many registered disabled people are employed by her Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30773]

Mr. Sproat: A central record of disabled people in the Department of National Heritage shows that there are nine currently in employment. This represents 2.7 per cent. of the total staff in post in the Department. We no longer differentiate between registered and non-registered disabled people in our central records.

Television Violence

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations her Department held with the Home Office in preparing the provisions of the Broadcasting Bill concerning the depiction of violence on television. [30508]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* Policy responsibility for broadcasting issues rests with my Department. Consultations were held with a number of other Government Departments in the course of preparing the provisions of the Broadcasting Bill; there was no policy matter in the Bill in respect of the depiction of violence on television requiring consultation with the Home Office.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 June 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he intends to take to reduce the length of time prisoners are held on remand in custody awaiting trial. [30269]

Mr. Streeter: I have been asked to reply.

The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Bill Michie, dated 6 June 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about what action has been taken to reduce the delays in arranging the trials of defendants in custody.

In the financial year 1995/96, the Crown Court sat a record number of 88,775 days, an increase on the previous year of 648 days, and although the number of outstanding cases had fallen substantially by the end of the year, it is planned to maintain this level and to sit 88,318 days in 1996/97.

Since January 1996, all cases committed to the Crown Court by magistrates' courts are automatically given a date for a plea and directions earing (and when the defendant is in custody, this is within four weeks of committal). This procedure ensures that all cases are subject to judicial management at an early stage. This enables the parties immediately to raise with the judge, any problems which might cause delay. At this hearing, the defendant has the opportunity to enter a plea. Defendants who pleads guilty, are sentenced immediately thus reducing the time spent on remand; if a plea of not guilty is entered, the court is required to bear in mind the statutory custody time limits which require that a date for trial be fixed within sixteen weeks of the date of committal unless the judge extends that period. The prosecution and the defence are expected to be able to tell the court what dates their witnesses are available to give evidence so that the trial can begin on the date arranged. In general, cases where the defendant is in custody have priority over cases where defendants are on bail. When a trial date cannot be arranged within sixteen weeks from committal—for example if key witnesses are not available within that time—the reasons for this are recorded and a further hearing is fixed to review progress and to fix a date for trial.

In August 1995, a new system of collecting information n the reasons for delay in cases where the defendant is in custody was introduced in all Crown Court centres. Detailed information is reported to regional managers monthly and senior managers receive reports on individual cases that are not heard within sixteen weeks. Senior managers also discuss their courts performance in reducing delay at regular reviews with me. In addition to the administrative action to the monitors delays, senior judges in the courts and the Circuit Presiding Judges are provided with details on a monthly basis of custody cases which have not been dealt with within 16 weeks of committal.

The combined effect of these initiatives has been to reduce waiting times for all cases, but particularly those for defendants in custody. The average waiting time for custody cases is now 11.4 weeks compared with 13.4 weeks for the financial year 1994/95 and the Court Service expects waiting times to continue to fall. In addition to maintaining the high level of sittings mentioned above, the target level for the key performance indicator of 70% of all defendants to be dealt with within 16 weeks of committal, has been increased to 75% for 1996/97.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Supplies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what voluntary leakage reduction target each water company has set over the next five and 10 years. [27164]

Mr. Clappison: *Pursuant to his reply 30 April 1996, Official Report*, c. *420*: The leakage target shown in the table for Dwr Cymru should read: "Aim to achieve a reduction of 17 per cent. by 2000 and over a third by 2010".

Environment Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department has given to the Environment Agency in respect of *(a)* action to deal with foul water flooding, *(b)* abandoned mines water discharges, *(c)* flood alleviation and *(d)* unsatisfactory storm overflows; and what is the regional distribution of *(a) (b)* and *(d)*. [30001]

Mr. Clappison: No guidance in respect of action to deal with foul water flooding has been issued by the Department to the Environment Agency. I understand that Ofwat holds information about the distribution of foul water flooding.

No specific guidance has been given to the Environment Agency regarding discharges from abandoned mines. The regional distribution of such discharges was described in detail in "Abandoned Mines and the Water Environment," a report issued by the National Rivers Authority in March 1994.

My right hon. and learned Friend, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, are responsible for policy on flood alleviation. The published "Strategy for Flood and Coastal Defence in England and Wales" provides a comprehensive framework for the Environment Agency to work within.

Guidance is being prepared to assist both dischargers and the Environment Agency in implementing the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994. It will include guidance on the limitation of pollution from storm water overflows. Information about numbers and location of unsatisfactory storm overflows will be held by the regional offices of the Environment Agency.

Sharks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the recent change in status of the basking shark under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources red list will affect the proposal to protect the species under section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 currently under review; and if he will make a statement. [31334]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *134*.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Government's statutory conservation adviser, will take account of all relevant conservation data, including the IUCN red list where appropriate, when considering which species should be protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as part of the third quinquennial review. The committee's recommendations to the Secretary of State are due to be submitted in October 1996.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what programme of action his Department has to protect the basking shark under the EU habitats and species directive; and if he will make a statement. [31335]

Mr. Clappison: The basking shark is not listed in the annexes to Council directive 92/43/EEC—the habitats and species directive. Nor is it included in the list of species for which action plans will be prepared over the next three years under the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work has been undertaken by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to assess the threats to the basking shark in United Kingdom waters over the last five years. [31337]

Mr. Clappison: The joint nature conservation committee and the Government's statutory conservation agencies have contributed funds to a number of research projects concerned with the status of the basking shark in British waters in the last five years.

These projects include acoustic tagging of basking sharks for tracking and monitoring, plankton and water quality sampling, and funding for a basking shark watch scheme. The JNCC has also supported several workshops which have brought together expertise and existing knowledge on basking sharks.

Housing Points

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to modify the Housing Corporation's advice on the granting of points for a local connection in line with amendments to homeless persons legislation. [30975]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Corporation will be revising its guidance to registered social landlords about access to social housing in the light of the legislative changes currently before Parliament.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the Housing Corporation ending the practice of associations awarding additional points for a local connection. [30976]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Corporation has not changed its guidance on allocations. We have received no representations on this matter.

Pennington Sewage Treatment Plant

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the secondary biological treatment plant at Pennington is equipped with ultra-violet disinfection equipment by Southern Water Services. [31168]

Mr. Clappison: UV disinfection equipment is not required for secondary treatment. Secondary biological treatment when installed at Pennington will significantly improve the microbiological quality of the receiving water. Water quality in the area will be re-assessed once the new scheme comes into effect.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of standard spending assessment per person for each of the new unitary authorities created on 1 April. [31169]

Sir Paul Beresford: The standard spending assessments requested are as shown in the table.

	SSA £ per head
Bath and north-east Somerset	664.62
Bristol	699.88
South Gloucestershire	622.56
North Somerset	647.33
Hartlepool	815.36
Middlesborough	862.89
Redcar and Cleveland	805.25
Stockton on Tees	772.02
East Riding of Yorkshire	668.03
Kingston upon Hull	813.89
North-east Lincolnshire	760.06
North Lincolnshire	718.32
York	629.64

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the current key performance targets for the Building Research Establishment. [31805]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 2 April 1996 his proposals for transferring the Building Research Establishment to the private sector by February 1997. While it remains an executive agency, BRE is working to the following key targets for 1996–97:

net vote cost of £545,000;

deficit on trading account no greater than £119,000;

gross non-Exchequer income of £3.56 million;

an increase of less than 4 per cent. in the average unit cost of research commissions.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will issue the Government's response to the second report of the Environment Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns, HC497 of Session 1994–95. [32086]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have today published their response to the Select Committee and copies have been placed in the Library.

Water (Pesticides)

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the working party on the incidence of pesticides in water will publish its report. [31804]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The working party on the incidence of pesticides in water has today published its review on the monitoring of pesticides in water in the United Kingdom. I am placing a copy in the Library. It concludes that:

there is a basically sound system of monitoring and investigation that has emerged out of a long established intention to control pesticides effectively.

However, it has identified some gaps in monitoring and it has made some recommendations for improvements.

This report provides a comprehensive summary of the data which is available on pesticides in water. A group, led by the Environment Agency, will be formed to ensure that there is an ongoing review of monitoring requirements and that monitoring efforts are most effectively directed.

Rack Marsh, Bagnor

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has been given in relation to the creation of a site of special scientific interest at Rack marsh, near Bagnor in Berkshire. [31362]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 5 June 1996]:* I understand that English Nature's Council has approved the notification of Kennet and Lambourn floodplain, Berkshire/Wiltshire as a site of special scientific interest. The area known as Rack marsh forms a component part of this composite site. English Nature is now notifying owners and occupies of the council's decision.

Vertigo Moulinsiana Snail

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has been given in relation to the creation of a special area of conservation for the vertigo moulinsiana snail in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys. [31363]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 5 June 1996]:* English Nature, through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, has formally recommended that eight separate locations in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys be considered as a possible candidate for designation in due course as a special area of conservation under the European directive 92/43/EEC—the habitats directive—following the discovery in the area of large populations of the species Vertigo moulinsiana, Desmoulin's whorl snail. All the relevant survey material has been placed in the Library. The Government have accepted this recommendation and public consultation on this proposal is now under way.

The JNCC has also recommended that parts of the Avon valley appear to qualify for possible designation, subject to more detailed survey work to determine boundaries. If this recommendation is confirmed and accepted, public consultation on a site in this area will be undertaken in due course.

Another possible site, Chilbolton common, on which public consultation has already taken place, is, in the light of recent survey material, not now considered by the JNCC to be of sufficiently high quality to qualify for SAC status and is withdrawn from further consideration.

The recommendation of parts of the Kennet and Lambourn floodplains and part of the Avon valley as possible SACs for this species seems to me to be consistent with the requirements of article 4 and annex III of the habitats directive and with the United Kingdom approach to selection of possible SACs for other habitat types and species. The JNCC's advice is that these two sites would complement the selection of three other sites for this species in East Anglia which have already been submitted as candidate SACs to the European Commission following consultation.

The implications of the JNCC's advice for the Newbury bypass are explained in a separate answer given today to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads.

I consider that, subject to the outcome of public consultation, a proposal for five high quality sites would comply with the obligations under the habitats directive to make a contribution to the Natura 2000 network in proportion to the representation within this country of the habitat of the species. The course of action announced today in respect of the safeguarding of Vertigo moulinsiana is also consistent with my general endorsement on 15 May of the biodiversity steering group's report which recommended an action plan for the species.

HEALTH

Lariam

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on adverse drug reaction to the anti-malarial drug Lariam (Mefloquine); and if he will indicate the number and type of reactions reported. [31322]

Mr. Malone: None.

The Medicines Control Agency monitors adverse reactions reported with Lariam and evaluates potential safety issues in the light of any new evidence that emerges. The MCA received 956 reports of 2,678 suspected adverse reactions associated with Lariam between 1990, when the product was launched in the United Kingdom, and 1 June 1996. During this time in excess of half a million patients have received Lariam. The reports received are consistent with the known safety profile of Lariam as described in the authorised product information.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *515*, how much his Department estimated it would have cost to provide the information requested. [31460]

Mr. Horam: More than £450, the current threshold above which answers are deemed to incur disproportionate cost.

Health Authorities (Severance Costs)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to hold centrally information in respect of severance costs incurred by health authorities to achieve management cost reductions targets; and if he will make a statement. [31425]

Mr. Malone: No.

Cash Limits and Running Costs

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes will be made to the cash limits and running costs limit of his Department in 1996–97. [31969]

Mr. Dorrell: The cash limit for class XI vote 1—hospital community health, family health and related services, England—will be reduced by £4,000,000 (from £27,686,304,000 to £27,682,304,000). This allows for a transfer to class XI, vote 2—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal services, England—in respect of a re-apportionment between health votes.

The cash limit for class XI, vote 2—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England—will be increased by £35,984,000, from £1,173,472,000 to £1,209,456,000. This allows for an increase of £36,000,000; £25,000,000 for services for people seeking asylum; £7,000,000 for a grant to the Thalidomide Trust, and £4,000,000—running costs—for a transfer from class XI, vote 1 as mentioned. The overall increase is partially offset by a transfer of £16,000 to class VI, vote 2—regeneration and countryside and wildlife, England—in respect of a project requiring assistance from the European regional development fund.

The Department's gross running costs limit will be increased by £4,002,000 from £276,202,000 to £280,204,000 reflecting the transfer. Also the original running cost limit published in the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses", Cm 3201, table 3.8a was understated by £2,000.

All increases will either be offset by foregoing the take-up of end year flexibility, transfer to or from other votes or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Youth Treatment Service Group

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the fourth report of the youth treatment service group; and if he will make a statement. [32062]

Mr. Bowis: Copies of the report have been placed in the Library today. I have accepted the recommendations in the report and charged the management of the Glenthorne youth treatment centre with its implementations. Following this report and the closure of the St. Charles YTC, the group has now completed its task.

I am grateful to Mrs. Winifred Tumim and her colleagues on the group for the valuable work they have done over the years. Mr. Tom White, who was a member of the group, has agreed to continue to make independent visits to the Glenthorne youth treatment centre.

Mental Health Review Tribunal

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the waiting times by section, between applications being received by the mental health review tribunal service and the hearings taking place; and what assessment he has made of the scope for reducing the waiting times. [30444]

Mr. Bowis: The tables give details of the waiting times for the last quarter of 1995. The tribunal offices are currently working to an eight week deadline for non restricted cases outside the special hospitals and 20 weeks for restricted cases outside the special hospitals. Deadlines for section 2 cases are determined by legislation and are required to be heard within one week of application. Delay times are continuously being monitored and options considered to improve the overall waiting times.

Waiting times last quarter of 1995
Non-restricted cases

	Under 8 weeks	*9–12 weeks*	*Over 12 weeks*
NHS hospitals (665 cases)	303	293	69
Special hospitals (44 cases)	0	14	30

Restricted cases

	Under 20 weeks	*21–24 weeks*	*Over 24 weeks*
NHS hospitals (171 cases)	102	29	40
Special hospitals (95 cases)	6	38	51

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the reappraisal he initiated six months ago of the provision of accident and emergency services at Edgware general hospital. [30583]

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future provision of accident and emergency services at Edgware general hospital. [31368]

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friends have made sure that I am fully aware of the strong local representations on this matter. Barnet health authority is discussing future medical involvement in the casualty services at Edgware hospital with local clinicians. A working group is expected to meet in early July to consider its recommendations. I will write to my hon. Friends following that meeting.

Elective Surgery

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual administrative costs of cancelling and re-scheduling elective surgery in the NHS. [31215]

Mr. Horam: The information needed for such an estimate is not available centrally.

NHS Waiting Lists

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost of administering waiting lists in the NHS. [31214]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

General Practitioners

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of forms completed by GPs annually. [31365]

Mr. Malone: The average general practitioner currently submits just over 600 claim forms per year. From 1 July 1996 approximately 30 per cent. of claim forms will be abolished and completion of the remainder may be delegated to practice staff. Doctors will also have to complete 400 fewer prescriptions per year and simplified patient registration forms mean that GPs benefit from a 34 per cent. reduction in the number of such forms to be signed.

Referrals

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of extra-contractual referral requests for secondary referrals are refused. [31366]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Appointments

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total number of "did not attends" for *(a)* out-patient appointments and *(b)* in-patient appointments in the NHS in the last available year. [31367]

Mr. Horam: The total number of "did not attends" for out-patient appointments during 1994–95 was 5,131,405. In the calendar year 1995, there were 209,082 "did not attends" for in-patient or day case admissions.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zambia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken following the announcement by the Zambian authorities of the disqualification of ex-President Kenneth Kaunda from the current year's elections. [31170]

Mr. Hanley: We have already made clear to the Government of Zambia our concern that measures to restrict eligibility of candidates for president damage Zambian democracy and risk undermining the multi-party system.

Bosnia

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what ways the British Government are working with *(a)* the Bosnian Government and *(b)* other European countries to conduct a survey of the needs and locations of amputees needing prostheses in Bosnia. [31119]

Mr. Hanley: We are not currently participating in any survey of the needs and locations of amputees in Bosnia. However, ODA is in close contact with the Bosnian Government on establishing its priorities for bilateral assistance in the health sector, including the needs of those disabled in the war.

Police Training

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *385-87*, if he will list, by name, the individual projects or schemes under the ODA's country aid programme, under which funding is given to countries to finance training of police officers *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in their home countries; and if he will list which countries have benefited from each project. [31161]

Mr. Hanley: The ODA does not keep centrally a record of the titles of individual projects which finance the training of police officers either in the United Kingdom or in their home countries. Police training projects are managed and recorded on a country basis only and it would involve a disproportionate cost to collate this information.

TREASURY

Tax (Self-assessment)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the effect of the change in the dates on which SC60 tax refunds will be made as a result of the switch to self-assessment; and if he will make a statement; [30593]

(2) when SC60 tax refunds relating to accounts years ending in tax years 1995–96 and 1996–97 will be made; what account will be taken of the timing of the relevant 1996–97 assessment in issuing these refunds; and if he will make a statement. [30592]

Mr. Jack: Refunds of deductions made from the earnings of self-employed sub-contractors in the construction industry—SC60 refunds—are made, and will continue to be made, where the sub-contractor can demonstrate that the deductions for any tax year exceeded his full liability to income tax and class IV national insurance contributions for that year. Although a sub-contractor's self-assessment for 1996–97 will not be due until 31 January 1998, this will not prevent a refund of SC60 deductions being made at an earlier date, if his liability for the year can be established. The Inland Revenue are drawing up guidelines for such claims to repayment, which will shortly be sent in draft to the representatives bodies for comment.

It is impossible to predict the effect of self assessment upon the timing of claims to repayment of SC60 deductions.

Credit Unions

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the length of time taken currently, from the initial application, for credit unions to be registered under the Credit Unions Act 1979; and what estimate he has made of the length of time which will be taken under the Act as amended by the Deregulation (Credit Unions) Order 1996. [31056]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The time taken for a credit union to be registered depends largely on how soon its committee members undergo training and set up the systems needed to run its operations. The deregulation order will not reduce that, though it will cut down the amount of work involved in determining the existence of a common bond among the members. However, as this normally takes place concurrently with other activities, it is unlikely to reduce the overall time taken for registration.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria the Registry of Friendly Societies will use to assess the status of credit unions wishing to register under the Credit Union Act 1979 as amended by the Deregulation (Credit Unions) Order 1996. [31055]

Mrs. Knight: To be registered a credit union must satisfy the registry that its objectives are the promotion of thrift among members, and the provision of credit at a fair rate of interest; that a common bond exists between members; that it is complying with statutory provisions for rules and insurance against fraud; and that its officers have received appropriate training.

The Deregulation (Credit Unions) Order 1996 will not change the assessment criteria used by the registry, but will allow greater flexibility in establishing a common bond. A guidance note for new credit unions is given to those seeking to start a credit union, and I have placed a copy in the Library.

Drug Seizures

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drug seizures were made by Customs and Excise in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands in each year since 1990; and if he will indicate for each year the percentage change from the last one. [31095]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The number of drug seizures made by Customs and Excise in Coventry and the west midlands, and percentage changes were as follows:

	Coventry		*West Midlands*	
	Number	*Per cent. change*	*Number*	*Per cent. change*
1990	0	—	65	—
1991	0	—	64	–1
1992	15	—	94	+46
1993	16	+7	87	–7
1994	14	–13	93	+7
1995	23	+64	120	+29

Living Standards

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the average living standards in each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country in 1995; and what was the gap between the United Kingdom and the OECD average. [30796]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The most commonly cited single measure of living standards for which valid international comparison can be made is gross domestic product per capita.

The 1995 figures for GDP per capita are available for all OECD countries in the OECD publication "Main Economic Indicators", which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figure. [30770]

Mrs. Angela Knight: As at 1 April 1996, the Treasury employed three registered disabled people, which represents 0.27 per cent. of the Treasury staff. The Treasury also employs a number of disabled people who have chosen not to register, or who became disabled after the withdrawal of the registration scheme under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy in respect of the pound sterling eventually re-joining a system of managed exchange rates. [30795]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Prime Minister has made clear on many occasions the Government's policy which is that the United Kingdom will not rejoin the ERM during this Parliament, and there is no question of us ever rejoining a rigid, old-style exchange rate mechanism.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the limit below which delivery of an inheritance tax account is not required for administering a deceased person's estate. [32064]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue has today laid regulations increasing the overall limit from £145,000 to £180,000, and relaxing the current rules on lifetime gifts and overseas assets. The changes will come into operation from 1 July 1996, for estates of persons dying on or after 6 April 1996. They will simplify the administration of some 7,500 estates in 1996–97.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [32166]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the United Kingdom at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Luxembourg on 3 June.

At the start of the meeting we reminded the Council that the Prime Minister had made it clear that until there was agreement to lift the export ban on beef derivatives, and until a clear framework was in place leading to a lifting of the wider ban, the UK could not be expected to continue to co-operate normally on other Community business. As a result, the UK could not be expected to agree decisions requiring unanimity.

I later made clear that the UK would not be able to agree the common position on the regulation on the protection of the Community's financial interests although the UK supported the regulation. I also put down a general reserve on a proposal for a directive for a common system of VAT on agricultural outputs.

With the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment, I attended a joint lunch with other EU Finance Ministers and Social Affairs Ministers at which we discussed the importance and priority of tackling unemployment.

As preparation for the forthcoming Florence European Council, the Council considered a report on progress to date in preparing for stage 3 of economic and monetary union, an interim report on follow-up to discussion of employment at previous European Councils—a substantive report is due for the Dublin European Council—and a draft of the broad economic policy guidelines for the Community and member states.

The Council decided to reinstate the excessive deficit decision relating to Germany and to abrogate the excessive deficit decision against Denmark. The Council did not reach agreement on a proposal to extend the European Investment bank mandate to lend to Asia and Latin America. The Council was consulted on the recommendation by the European Monetary Institute council for the appointment of a new president of the EMI and briefly considered a paper on pension reform in the EU and central and east European countries in preparation for the structured dialogue at the 8 July ECOFIN.

Company Profits (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account was taken in the company profit component of the gross domestic product figures for the Isle of Wight of the profits of companies or holding companies whose headquarters are not based on the Isle of Wight; and how the effects of the rules relating to habitual residence were applied. [28442]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 May 1996]:* For the compilation of regional gross domestic product, profits of multi-regional companies are allocated to the area in which they are generated, either directly where data are available or otherwise by the use of proxies such as wages and salaries of employees in the area.

Habitual residence appears to refer to the main residence of an individual for the Inland Revenue's assessment of tax. Taxes are transfers of income not involving productive activity; habitual residence is not a term associated with gross domestic product since the latter is a measure of production.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the security of human rights in Hong Kong after 1 July 1997. [30977]

Mr. David Davis: The Sino-British joint declaration on the question of Hong Kong, which is a binding treaty between Britain and China, provides for continuing human rights protection in Hong Kong after the handover. Specifically, in the last paragraph of chapter XIII of annex I to the joint declaration, China pledges to ensure that the provisions of the international covenants on civil and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights, as applied to Hong Kong, remain in force after 30 June 1997.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the interpretation by the Standing Committee of the National Peoples Congress on the implementation in Hong Kong of the Chinese nationality law. [32165]

Mr. Rifkind: The interpretation in question states that British citizenship acquired by Chinese nationals under the British nationality selection scheme will not be recognised under the Chinese nationality law. The British Government regard British citizenship obtained under the BNSS as having exactly the same validity as British citizenship acquired in any other way. We do not differentiate between British citizens who have acquired their British citizenship through the BNSS and those who have acquired it in any other way. Passports issued under the BNSS are the same as passports issued to all other British citizens and are equally valid.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. [31241]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* There has been encouraging progress in recent months. The steering committee of the international conference on Indo-Chinese refugees, which held its final meeting on March, emphasised that those screened out as non-refugees must return to Vietnam. We have been working hard to raise the monthly number of returnees, with good co-operation from the Vietnamese Government. As a result, the rate of both voluntary and orderly repatriation has increased. It remains our objective to complete the repatriation of Vietnamese migrants by July 1997.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figure. [30765]

Mr. David Davis: Based on a voluntary survey of staff, as at 1 April 1996 the Foreign and Commonwealth employed 48 registered disabled officers. This is 0.7 per cent. of the total number of staff employed.

Military Training

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what type of projects and programmes constitute the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme. [31110]

Mr. David Davis: The military training assistance scheme sponsors developmental and skills training in the UK. This can include training which has a main or subsidiary aim of familiarising participants with British military techniques and equipment. It also provides for in-country developmental and skills training by UK trainers on attachments overseas, the training of nationals from several countries at regional centres, and sponsorship of participants in courses operated by organisations such as the United Nations.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Governments fund the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme; and in what proportions. [31112]

Mr. Davis: UKMTAS is entirely funded by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many police officers from other countries have received training under the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme. [31111]

Mr. Davis: Full details are available only from 1990. Since then, some 179 police officers from overseas countries have attended training courses in the UK sponsored by the scheme.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost to public funds of the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme for each year since its inception. [31109]

Mr. Davis: The scheme has been operating in its current form since 1988. Annual financial year expenditure is:

	£ million
1988–89	13.2
1989–90	15.5
1990–91	18.1
1991–92	15.2
1992–93	12.5
1993–94	11.8
1994–95	12.0
1995–96	[1]13.5

[1] Estimate.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which have received training of police officers under the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme. [31113]

Mr. Davis: In recent years officers from the following police forces have received training sponsored by the scheme:

Belize, Chile, Czech Republic, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Fiji, Honduras, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Nepal, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Palestinian Authority, Philippines, Romania, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Tonga, Uganda and Vanuatu.

European Union Flag

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions were issued to his Department's offices and agencies in respect of flying the European Union flag on 8 May; and if he will make a statement. [31505]

Mr. David Davis: None.

Kashmir

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when elections are scheduled to take place in Azad Kashmir to elect a new Government; if he will arrange for United Kingdom observers to monitor those elections; and if he will make a statement. [31466]

Mr. David Davis: Legislative assembly elections will be held on 30 June. Staff from our High Commission in Islamabad will visit Azad Kashmir during the elections.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) by what methods the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is currently monitoring the health of the service volunteers who took part in studies at the establishment with the nerve agent pre-treatment sets; [31347]

(2) when the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment carried out studies to evaluate whether nerve agent pre-treatment sets caused long-term health effects in humans; and what were the conclusions of these studies. [31346]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your questions about studies into the long term health effects on humans and the monitoring of the health Service volunteers who took part in studies with the Nerve Agent Pre-treatment Sets (NAPS). I am replying to both questions in this letter as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), which now includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector (CBD) in its Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD).

There have not been any studies directly undertaken by CBD Sector, Porton Down, to assess long term health effects on humans of the administration of NAPS tablets and no monitoring of the health of volunteers who took part in studies involving the administration of NAPS is currently being conducted. The active ingredient of NAPS tablets is pyridostigmine bromide, which is licensed for use in the clinical treatment of myasthenia gravis. Adults with this complaint take dosages far in excess of that found in NAPS tablets over extended periods, in some cases for life. There are no indications that these high doses over long period of time give rise to long term health effects.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 May, *Official Report*, columns *223–24*, if Porton Down has used service personnel from the service volunteers programme in work which Porton Down has carried out for civilian organisations since 1996; and what has been Porton Down's policy on involving service volunteers in work for civilian organisations. [31349]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question asking whether Service volunteers have been used in work carried out by Porton Down for civilian organisations. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

No Service volunteers have been involved in work carried out by Porton Down for civilian organisations since 1966. The purpose of the Service volunteer programme is to ensure that any protective measures proposed by CBD Sector are acceptable from a military point of view and therefore it would not be appropriate to involve Service volunteers in work which was not directly relevant to military situations. Moreover, the independent ethics Committee which reviews all protocols for work with volunteers must satisfy itself that there is a military justification for the work before it approves a protocol and no such work can be started until the ethics Committee's approval has been received.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to evaluate the long-term health effects of short-term exposure to the nerve agent Soman (GD); when these studies were carried out; and what were their conclusions. [31341]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to you question concerning studies involving the nerve agent Soman. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

No studies have been conducted to evaluate long term health effects on volunteers exposed to Soman. The only study carried out by CBD Sector specifically to investigate the long term effects of short term exposure to Soman examined the effects on mouse diaphragm muscle. The study indicated that subtle changes were observed in tissue 3 days after exposure to Soman. However, there was no observable difference in response between exposed and unexposed tissue 28 days after exposure. The findings of the study were published in the Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology in 1993 (Volume 45, pages 176–181).

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 May, *Official Report*, column *187*, what was the amount of sarin to which volunteers were exposed in the study using single fibre electromyography. [31342]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your further question about the single fibre electromyography study. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

In this study Service volunteers breathed in Sarin nerve agent vapour whilst walking in an exposure chamber at Porton Down. The Sarin was present at a concentration of 0.5mg m^3 and the volunteers were exposed for 30 minutes. The results of this study have now been reported in the open literature and can be found in the journal "Human and Experimental Toxicology" (1996) Volume 15, pages 369–75.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which division within the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has had overall responsibility for running the service volunteers programme since 1966. [31343]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question about responsibility for running the Service volunteer programme at the Chemical and Biological Establishment since 1966. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

In the period from 1966 to 1995 the Medical Division of the former Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment had overall responsibility for administering the Service volunteer programme. The responsibilities included co-ordination of the requests for volunteers to participate in studies, conducting medical examinations, providing medical supervision of studies, maintaining the records of volunteer attendance and liaison with military authorities. Since the internal reorganisation that was prompted by the move of CBDE into the DERA trading fund in 1995 these duties have been discharged by the Medical Countermeasures business centre.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 May, *Official Report*, column *222*, for what reasons staff at Porton Down are not allowed to test chemical agents on themselves; and how many staff have deviated from the policy on self-testing since 1966. [31344]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your further question about self experimentation by staff at Porton Down. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection

and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

Staff at Porton Down are not allowed to test chemical agents on themselves because this would not be consistent with the proper ethical control, oversight and experimental design required for work of this nature. The scientific value of such studies would be very limited. We are not aware of any formal studies since 1966 which deviated from this policy.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 May, *Official Report*, column *223*, what details of experiments are given on request to the doctors of service personnel who took part in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment in cases where the service personnel have died. [31345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning information provided to the doctors of deceased volunteers at the former Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE). The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

To date we have not received any enquiries from the doctors of deceased former volunteers. If we were to be approached by a doctor acting on behalf of relatives in such circumstances we would provide them with the same information as if the patient was still living.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment carried out experiments with service volunteers involving the nerve agent GE; and what were the conclusions of this work. [31348]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 6 June 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your question about experiments with Service volunteers involving the nerve agent GE. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Protection and Life Sciences division (PLSD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

The nerve agent GE was investigated in the early years of the nerve agent programme and those studies indicated that it caused similar effects to other organophosphorus nerve agents. No work involving GE and Service volunteers has been carried out since the early 1950's.

I hope this information is helpful.

Submarine Reactor Flasks

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the submarine reactor flasks being built by Rolls-Royce and Associates. [31327]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A contract for the design and build of purpose-built used fuel flasks for the transportation of used submarine reactor fuel was awarded to Rolls-Royce and Associates in May 1995. Manufacture of the flasks is sub-contracted to BNFL Engineering Ltd. Delivery is currently planned for the end of 1998.

Upholder Submarines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what receipts from the sale of his Department's Upholder class submarines will be retained by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [31173]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I currently expect that all the receipts accruing from the sale of the Upholder class submarines will be retained by the Ministry of Defence. In the event that actual receipts exceed voted provision, Government accounting regulations stipulate that the excess goes to the Consolidated Fund.

Married Housing Estate

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guarantees on future standards of repair and maintenance will be sought from private sector institutions which purchase leases on his Department's married housing stock. [31171]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As I told the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 23 April, *Official Report*, column *83*, my Department will retain responsibility for the management and maintenance of the quarters which we lease back. This responsibility will continue to be discharged by the Defence Housing Executive after the sale.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be responsible for setting the rent levels and what account will be taken of local pay levels and circumstances after the sale of the married housing stock. [31172]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 4 June to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), *Official Report*, column *344*.

Army Technical Support Agency

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets he has set for the Army Technical Support Agency in 1996–97. [32148]

Mr. Soames: The chief executive of the Army Technical Support Agency has been set the following key targets for 1996–97:

Key target 1: Influence equipment design by attaining 70 per cent. acceptance of land systems technical support recommendations.

Key target 2: Achieve a 10 per cent. gross cost saving in advanced order recommended spares purchasing without reducing sustainability or availability of equipment.

Key target 3: Answer 90 per cent. of ad hoc inquiries within two working days.

Key target 4: Achieve an average response time of nine working days for demand for technical publications.

Key target 5: Complete 90 per cent. of operational (O) projects and 65 per cent. of priority A projects before the agreed target date.

Key target 6: Reduce the administrative lead time to complete initial spares provisioning lists to 10 months.

Key target 7: Satisfy 90 per cent. customers when undertaking technical projects.

Key target 8: Improve efficiency by 3.6 per cent. over 1995–96.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figure. [30768]

Mr. Arbuthnot: At 1 October 1995, the number of registered disabled people employed by the MOD and its agencies was 1,333. This represents 1.2 per cent. of the total staff.

Disposal Sales Agency

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets he has set for the Disposal Sales Agency in 1996–97. [32147]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since its launch in October 1994 the agency has brought in substantial revenues and has made significant efficiency savings. The key targets which have been set for the chief executive of the Disposal Sales Agency for this financial year are aimed at maintaining the momentum achieved in previous years through industrial participation and other efficiency measures.

1. To achieve disposal sales revenue of £80 million within budgetary cost allocation;

2. To secure efficiency savings of £4 million against the baseline of 1994–95 unit cost of generating £1 million of sales;

3. To increase to 85 per cent. the volume of receipts (excluding Government-to-Government) achieved through contractorised arrangements;

4. To achieve £1 million of sales on behalf of other Government departments and agencies.

National Enterprise Board

Mr. Waller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the National Enterprise Board. [32070]

Mr. Lang: On 5 June 1996 I signed an order under section 11(2) of the British Technology Group Act 1991 dissolving the National Enterprise Board with effect from 1 July 1996.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industry Council

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Industry Council held on 20 May. [30816]

Mr. Eggar: The Council adopted a resolution on industrial co-operation with third countries, particularly the Mediterranean region. The Council also agreed conclusions on shipbuilding which noted the state of ratification of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development agreement.

The Council also reached political agreement on a basis text of a Council decision implementing a third multi-annual programme for small and medium enterprises which incorporated a United Kingdom request for additional wording highlighting value for money considerations. I placed a parliamentary reserve on the text as a whole.

The Commission made oral presentations on its proposal for a new steel aid code to replace the current one which expires on 31 December, developments in the EU competition policy during 1995; its communications on the competitiveness of the chemical industry and on the textile and clothing subcontracting sector. The latter was referred back to COREPER for further consideration.

Finally, under any other business, the Commission gave a brief report on last week's G7 information society conference in South Africa.

Post Office Security Equipment

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contributions were made by his Department for the provision of security equipment in local post offices in each of the last five years. [31138]

Mr. Oppenheim: The provision of security equipment in sub-post offices is a matter for Post Office Counters Ltd. and sub-postmasters.

Telecommunications (Liberalisation)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the results of his consideration of responses to his consultation document on the liberalisation of international telecommunications services. [32167]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government will be inviting applications from today for further licences to provide international service from the UK, on the same terms enjoyed up to now by only BT and Mercury—that is, on telecommunication facilities owned and controlled by the company providing the service. These companies will be able to offer services on any route they choose.

This is another step in ensuring the continued competitiveness of the United Kingdom, both as a hub for telecommunications traffic worldwide, and as a place where the increasing number of companies for whom telecommunications play a major role in their business will choose to base their operations.

I believe that this further liberalisation will benefit users by bringing down international rates more quickly, and benefit the UK economy by attracting new investment, both by telecommunications operators and user companies, to the UK.

In parallel, we will be continuing to press for improved access for UK operators, both within the EU through strict application of new Community liberalisation rules, and in other countries through the World Trade Organisation.

I am also pleased to announce that the UK will, on 1 July, be lifting the "equivalency" rules which at present limit international simple resale services to certain routes. We will allow the provision of telecommunications services over leased line capacity on any route. I stress, however, that while we wish to open the UK market to full competition, we will ensure that such competition is fair.

I believe that liberalisation in Europe and other major markets reduces this risk of abuse by overseas companies which enjoy a monopoly or are inadequately regulated in their home market. One-way bypass—where companies might continue to charge UK-based carriers above-cost accounting rates, while delivering their own traffic more cheaply here—is an example of such abuse. We will be taking steps to deter such behaviour in the licences we shall be issuing.

The licences will contain many of the provisions already in public telecommunications operator licences and in those for international simple resale. In particular, we will wish to give the Director-General of Telecommunications powers to prevent one-way bypass or discriminatory practices between affiliate companies.

Where there is no overseas competition, provisions will be applied immediately requiring "proportionate return" both for resale and international facilities-based traffic. This will avoid rapid traffic imbalances occurring as a result of one-way bypass. Operators on these routes will also have to charge the same accounting rates as each other.

However, on the six routes which have already been found equivalent, and for EU routes, these obligations will be only reserve powers, and will not be applied unless market developments dictate. As other routes become more competitive, we will waive these last two requirements for those routes.

The new licences will be public telecommunications operator licences, and we will undertake the usual public consultations, and address any further issues which arise in the course of these applications. I aim to be able to issue the first licences from July.

Patent Office

Mr. Waller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Patent Office executive agency for 1996–97. [32069]

Mr. Lang: I have set the Patent Office the targets listed for 1996–97.

Efficiency

To increase output in relation to total staff numbers by 2 per cent.

To increase output in relation to total staff costs by 2 per cent.

To increase output in relation to current expenditure by 2 per cent.

Quality

To issue patent search reports within 12 weeks of receipt of a request in the Patent Office.

To issue patent examination reports within 18 months of publication.

To confirm payment of patent renewal fees within six working days of receipt in the Patents Office.

To issue initial search and examination reports on design applications within 12 weeks of receipt of request.

To confirm payment of design registration renewal fees within six working days of receipt in the Patent Office.

To issue trade mark examination reports within two months of data capture in the Patent Office.

To advertise within seven months of examination, trade mark applications which attract no substantive objection at the examination stage.

To register within four months of advertisement, trade mark applications which are not formally opposed.

In addition, I expect the chief executive of the Patent Office to continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Ariane 5

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom space policy of the launch failure of Ariane 5; and if he will make a statement. [31872]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The loss of the European Space Agency's first Ariane 5 launch vehicle and the four CLUSTER space science satellites is a great disappointment for everyone involved. The United Kingdom Government contributed £35 million to CLUSTER and invested £12 million in instrumentation. British scientists played a prominent role in the CLUSTER mission and the setback in the research community will be keenly felt. The agency's space science programme will, however, continue to provide important opportunities for British space scientists.

The UK will continue to support competitive European launch capacity to meet commercial and research programme needs. The UK contribution to Ariane, announced in March of this year, totals £2.8 million up to 2000 for the follow on programme for infrastructure. The UK Government also contribute £5 million a year to the operations of the Kourau launch centre. The decision to re-enter the Ariane programme came as a result of discussions with industry about the priorities for British space policy. A further space policy seminar with industry is to be held on 25 June.

The Government's interest in space focuses particularly on our contribution to the science programme and the increasingly important civil activities of earth observation, pollution monitoring, mineral extraction data, global navigation, telecommunications, television and weather forecasting.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, column *265*, how much Britain has gained or lost in pounds sterling as a result of changes in exchange rates in each of the last three years. [31261]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The structural funds regulations provide for a number of block allocations of grants for multi-annual programmes to be made to each member state. These allocations, like the whole of the EC budget, from which they are drawn, are denominated in ecu. Changes in exchange rates therefore affect the value in national currencies of the structural funds grants received by all member states. There are no losses or gains in sterling terms since the sterling equivalent of the ecu value of the allocations are known only when the programmes are completed.

Accounts (Late Filing Penalties)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the current tariff of penalties employed at Companies House for late filing of

accounts, indicating what size businesses the penalties relate to, and including the sliding scale for the length of delay in filing. [30729]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The registrar and chief executive of Companies House executive agency has delegated authority to deal with such matters on behalf of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The registrar has been asked to write to the hon. Lady.

Letter from John S. Holden to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 June 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning the current tariff of penalties employed at Companies House for late filing of accounts.

The scale of late filing penalties, the class of company against which these are levied and the time periods involved are set out in the following table.

Scale of Penalties

	Public companies £	Private companies £
Not more than 3 months late	500	100
More than 3 months but not more than 6 months late	1,000	250
More than 6 months but not more than 12 months late	2,000	500
More than 12 months late	5,000	1,000

The scale of penalties is laid down in Section 242A of the Companies Act and applies equally to all companies in each class, irrespective of their size.

I hope this is helpful.

Research Councils

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the memoranda issued to *(a)* the chief executives of the research councils, and *(b)* the director generals of the research councils setting out the conditions of their appointments. [31192]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The Director General of Research Councils is a senior civil servant serving on a limited period appointment. Apart from his performance bonus arrangements the conditions of his appointment are those of senior civil servants. The chief executives of the research councils are employees of the councils. I have placed in the Library of the House the statement issued to those appointed since 1 April 1994 detailing the conditions of their appointments as chief executive and as accounting officer.

Rail Transport Research

Mr. Riddick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures are being taken to ensure that research into rail transport continues following privatisation. [32168]

Mr. Watts: I have been asked to reply.

I have approved the establishment of a review to consider the best mechanism for directing and co-ordinating research and development in order to meet the needs of the new railway industry. The review will provide advice for the successor bodies, which, following privatisation, will be responsible for determining their own research requirements. It will be chaired by Professor Sir David Davies, chief scientific adviser, Ministry of Defence. Its membership comprises: Professor Brian Mellitt director, engineering and production, Railtrack plc; Mr. Gordon Pettitt, transport management consultant, formerly managing director, regional railways; Professor Tony Ridley, professor of Transport Engineering, University of London centre for transport studies; and Mr. Tony Roche, board member, engineering services and safety, British Railways Board. The review is currently in the process of collecting evidence and will present its findings and recommendations to the permanent secretary, Department of Transport, by late summer.

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Pensions

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the state pension for *(a)* a single pension and *(b)* a couple would have been in April 1995 and April 1996 if the pension in each of these years had been uprated by the higher of the retail prices index or earnings in both of these years; and what estimate he has made of (i) the gross additional costs of such increases in pension and (ii) the net cost after savings in (1) means-tested benefits and (2) increased Treasury receipts from income tax. [30163]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

	Retirement pension single rate £	*Retirement pension couple rate* £	*Cost to national insurance fund* £	*Savings in income-related benefits* £	*Increase in Treasury income tax receipts* £
1995–96	59.90	95.75	470 million	130 million	50 million
1996–97	62.25	99.50	510 million	140 million	50 million

Sources:

1. National insurance fund estimates provided by Government Actuary department.
2. Income-related benefit effects calculated using the policy simulation model 1996–97, based on the family expenditure surveys 1991, 1992 and 1993.
3. Income tax figures supplied by the Inland Revenue and calculated using provisional figures from a projection of the 1994 family expenditure survey.

Notes:

1. All costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million with the exception of income tax receipts which are rounded to the nearest £50 million.
2. The estimate for 1996–97 is based upon uprating the 1995–96 figures shown in the table.
3. Rates of retirement pension have been calculated on the basis of movement in the retail prices index and the average earnings, whole economy, index as produced by the Office of National Statistics as appropriate.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners will be affected by the reductions in the reduced earnings allowance. [30833]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on 25 April, column *252*.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what modification will be made in the application of the good cause clause in reduced earnings allowance cases which are restricted to 12 months' retrospection; and how they will now apply. [31258]

Mr. Evans: No change has been made to the application of the good cause provisions for late claims to reduced earnings allowance However, where there is good cause for a late claim or application for review of an award made on or after 24 March 1996, a maximum 12 months arrears of reduced earnings allowance is payable, in line with other, non-industrial injuries benefits.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if reduced earnings allowance will continue to be paid to a married woman who reaches 60 years of age but who has insufficient national insurance contributions to claim a retirement pension in her own right and her husband is in full-time employment and under 65 years of age. [31256]

Mr. Evans: Reduced earnings allowance recipients who have given up regular employment will transfer to retirement allowance after reaching state pension age.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the reasons for the 12-month restriction on back dating reduced earnings allowance in cases where the effects of a latent injury or disease have resulted in a loss of faculty which has reduced the claimant's earnings capacity; and what further retrospection will be allowed in such cases to the date of the last application for an award. [31257]

Mr. Evans: The introduction of a maximum 12-month period for payment of arrears of reduced earnings allowance is designed to bring the allowance into line with other, non-industrial injuries, earnings replacement benefits such as incapacity benefit or income support. Reduced earnings allowance is payable only in respect of industrial accidents occurring or prescribed diseases with a date of onset, before 1 October 1990. It is not justifiable to continue backdating payments in such claims indefinitely. Reduced earnings allowance can still be backdated for a maximum of 12 months where someone can show good cause for making a late claim.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received regarding the reduction in reduced earnings allowance; and how many of these representations express support for the changes he has made. [31143]

Mr. Evans: As at 31 May, 97 right hon. Members and two organisations have written to Ministers. The letters have generally expressed concern or sought clarification.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue a code of practice on access to goods, facilities, services and premises under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [32084]

Mr. Burt: I have today laid a draft code of practice covering rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises before Parliament under the powers contained in sections 51 and 52 of the Act. Proposals for the code were made by the National Disability Council following a very successful public consultation exercise. Response to the NDC's draft was favourable, with particular praise for the clear drafting and use of examples to explain the concepts contained in the Act.

In conjunction with the consultation by the NDC, the Government consulted on a number of proposals for regulations under part III of the Act. Regulations covering powers of attorney; insurance; guarantees and the exclusion of certain education-related services will be laid before Parliament in the near future.

The draft code of practice and the regulations will come into force on 2 December 1996, subject to parliamentary approval. The code will be published as soon as possible to give service providers, those involved in the selling, letting and managing of premises and others affected time to take account of its guide.

The Disability Discrimination Act is a huge step forward for disabled people. The code forms part of a co-ordinated framework of advice and guidance to ensure that the business community and disabled people are aware of their new duties and rights.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue guidance on the definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [32149]

Mr. Burt: I have today laid draft guidance before Parliament under the powers contained in section 3 of the Act. A draft of the guidance was issued as part of the recent consultation exercise carried out by the Department for Education and Employment. Many respondents to that consultation felt that the draft could be improved in terms of its structure and should provide fuller guidance. They also felt that the guidance in the draft should be put into context with references to the relevant provisions of the Act. The draft which I have laid before Parliament reflects these views. The Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. People who have had a disability in the past which met this definition are also protected by the Act. The guidance explains some of the matters to be taken into account in determining whether an impairment has this effect.

The guidance is not legally binding, but an industrial tribunal or court must take it into account where it appears to be relevant. In most cases it will be clear whether or not someone meets the definition of disability in the Act. The purpose of the guidance is to provide help where there is doubt over whether someone is disabled. It is designed primarily for courts or tribunals, but may also be of help to disabled people and businesses.

I have also laid regulations before Parliament which refine the Act's definition of disability. Proposals for the use of regulations on the definition of disability were also included in the DfEE's consultation exercise, and the regulations have been drafted to reflect views expressed. The regulations make it clear that addictions, anti-social behaviour and tattoos and body piercings will not entitle people to protection under the Act. They also make it clear that babies and young children are protected by the Act.

The regulations and the draft guidance will commence on 30 July 1996 subject to approval by Parliament.

TRANSPORT

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of the technical experts listed by his Department to take part in the second survey of the MV Derbyshire wreckage field. [31273]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 7 May, *Official Report*, column *52*.

Railfreight Distribution

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to privatise Railfreight Distribution; and if he will make a statement. [32067]

Mr. Watts: I have today announced that the Government have decided that Railfreight Distribution—British Rail's channel tunnel freight business—should be offered for sale as soon as possible. I have asked BR, in consultation with my Department, to draw up a programme for its disposal. The offer for sale will be based on the existing business.

Railfreight Distribution is heavily loss-making. Privatisation will enable the business to be put onto a sound financial footing so that the growth potential of international freight services via the channel tunnel can be exploited on a commercial basis, thereby furthering the objective of transferring more freight from road to rail.

Departmental Research Sites (Sale)

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the proposed sale of his Department's former research site at Crowthorne and Livingston. [32169]

Mr. Norris: My Department no longer needs to own the sites at Crowthorne and Livingston after the sale of the Transport Research Laboratory to the Transport Research Foundation. It has a 15-year lease at Crowthorne and a one-year tenancy at Livingston. Healey and Baker are to market the Crowthorne site and Richard Ellis the Livingston site. Applications are about to be made to the local planning authorities to confirm the existing use and planning status of each site, including the scope to rebuild on the sites. The sites will be put on the market in the near future.

British Rail Maintenance Ltd.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Ernst and Young's report of their emerging findings on the sale of British Rail's former heavy maintenance depots, British Rail Maintenance Ltd., will be available. [32068]

Mr. Watts: I have today placed a copy in the Library.

Newbury Bypass

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the implications for the Newbury bypass of the discovery of the snail Vertigo moulinsiana in the area; [32065]

(2) when the Highways Agency expects to award the main contract for the Newbury bypass; and if he will make a statement. [32066]

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which contractor has won the main contract for the construction of the Newbury bypass; [31360]

(2) which contractor has won the contract for archaeological work on the route of the Newbury bypass; [31361]

(3) what measures he expects the Highways Agency to take to replace any snail habitat lost through the construction of the Newbury bypass. [31364]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment explains today in a separate answer to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that public consultation is now under way on a formal recommendation by English Nature, made through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, that various locations in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys be considered as a possible candidate for designation in due course as a special area of conservation under European directive 92/43/EEC—the habitats directive—following the discovery of large populations of the species Vertigo moulinsiana, Desmoulin's whorl snail, in these locations.

One of the locations in question, Bagnor island, is due to be crossed by the Newbury bypass. Part of another area, Speen moor, will be affected by it. My right hon. Friend and I have accordingly considered JNCC's recommendation and the implications for the bypass.

The provisions of regulations 50 to 53 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994, review of existing decisions and consents, do not apply in the case of this site which is not yet a "European site" as defined by the regulations, nor is it yet subject to the policy protection which the Government apply to candidate SACs from the time when they are proposed to the Commission. However, in the light of the acknowledged conservation value of the site, my right hon. Friend and I have considered whether the bypass can proceed in a manner which is consistent with the conservation objectives of the directive.

The site recommended by JNCC consists of a cluster of eight separate locations, six of which are unaffected by the proposed bypass. The conservation objectives of the recommended SAC in the Kennet and Lambourn floodplain would be to seek to ensure that a large and viable overall population of the snail was maintained in the area. English Nature and the Highways Agency have

discussed measures to achieve these conservation objectives. Porous asphalt will be used to minimise spray and the discharge of run-off will be controlled to reduce pollution. A number of further measures which can be implemented by the Highways Agency have been agreed in principle with English Nature. These will reduce the extent of snail habitat which would otherwise be destroyed by the road, together with other measures to maintain the conservation status of the snail in the area. Areas of new habitat are planned which will be much greater than those lost. The main measures are detailed in paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4 (option 2A) in the report "A34 Newbury Bypass—Impact of the A34 on Vertigo Moulinsiana and Opportunities for Mitigation—May 1996", copies of which have been placed in the Library. English Nature considers that, subject to further detailed discussion, these measures, if successfully implemented, should maintain the overall snail populations within the Kennet and Lambourn floodplain, and extend the distribution of the snail within the area where these measures are to be carried out.

My right hon. Friend and I are in any case satisfied that there are no alternative solutions and that there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest for proceeding with the proposed bypass.

Both the need for the bypass and the choice of route were established following the statutory procedures set out in the Highways Act 1980, which included two public inquiries. In addition to these procedures, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport announced his conclusion on the choice of route following a further assessment in 1995. The assessment took into account changes in appraisal techniques and local circumstances, as well as new traffic and economic data since the public inquiries and the subsequent statutory decision to go ahead with a western bypass. He considered carefully the balance between all the options and concluded that the proposed route was the most effective solution for Newbury. Having considered the new information about Vertigo moulinsiana, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are satisfied that it does not change the balance of the weight of evidence, including environmental evidence, in favour of this particular route. As I have already explained, new measures will be adopted with the aim of reducing the effects of the road on the snail population.

The imperative reasons for overriding public interest for proceeding with the bypass are environmental, social and economic. In particular:

- the bypass will relieve the severe environmental problems along the existing A34 in the town including noise and reduced air quality. At present, around 50,000 vehicles per day use the A34 through Newbury. This figure could increase to 78,000 by the year 2010 if the bypass is not built. In particular, the bypass will reduce heavy lorry traffic through Newbury by up to about 70 per cent.;
- it will improve road safety. Over the next 30 years, we estimate that 28 lives will be saved, and an estimated 370 serious casualties and 1420 less serious injuries will be avoided;
- it will aid the economy. The A34 is an important route nationally, linking the North and the Midlands with the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. But high traffic volumes are causing long tailbacks and delays and these are getting worse. At peak times queues can extend over five miles either side of the town. The bypass will relieve a serious bottleneck on this important trunk road.

Extensive reviews of the trunk road programme in 1994 and 1995 have confirmed the need for the bypass.

My right hon. Friend and I are satisfied that the proposed course of action is consistent with the conservation objectives of the habitats directive. We have concluded after careful consideration that the bypass should proceed without further delay, and I instructed the Highways Agency to let the main contract for its construction.

Accordingly the main contract for the construction of the bypass has been awarded to Costain Civil Engineering Ltd. York Archaeological Trust has been awarded the contract for archaeological work along the route.

SCOTLAND

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figure. [30779]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of registered disabled staff employed the Scottish Office core and its executive agencies at 1 April 1996 is shown in the table.

Registered disabled staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April 1996

	Total	*Per cent.*
Registered disabled staff	58	1.1
All other staff	5,180	98.9

Water and Sewerage Authorities

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations led him to specify 6.5 per cent. as the rate of return he believes to be reasonable for the water and sewerage authorities. [30836]

Mr. Kynoch: The required rate of return reflects an assessment of the opportunity cost to the economy of new investment in activities such as the provision of water and sewerage services which involve low risk.

Ms Celia Urquhart

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the positions to which Ms Celia Urquhart has been appointed by his Department. [31067]

Mr. Kynoch: Ms Urquhart is currently a member of *(a)* the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland and *(b)* Scottish Enterprise.

Fixed Penalties

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases which have been dealt with by way of fixed penalty by procurators fiscal in Scotland in each of the past five years have also resulted in awards being made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. [31069]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what provisions it is necessary to establish that a crime has been committed before an award can be made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. [31070]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The board makes ex gratia payments of compensation in respect of eligible applications received up until 31 March 1996, under the provisions of the 1990 criminal injuries compensation scheme.

The terms of the scheme are reproduced in the board's annual reports, copies of each of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The scheme defines a criminal injury as one directly attributable to a crime of violence, including arson or poisoning, to an offence of trespass on a railway, or to activities such as attempting to apprehend an offender or prevent an offence being committed.

It is not necessary for an offender to have been convicted of a crime, but the board will not make an award if it is not persuaded that the injury has resulted from a crime of violence and may withhold or reduce compensation if the applicant has not taken, without delay, all reasonable steps to inform the police of the circumstances of the injury and to co-operate with the police in bringing the offender to justice. It is the board's policy to ask the police to investigate compensation applications which may be fraudulent, including those where there is a suspicion that the injury did not result from a criminal act.

Abortion

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many deaths were recorded as a result of abortion operations in Scotland in 1995; [31315]

(2) how many abortions *(a)* in total and *(b)* per 1,000 women were carried out in Scotland in 1995. [31319]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional number of abortions performed in Scotland under the Abortion Act 1967 in 1995 was 11,136; the rate per 1,000 women aged 15–44 was 10.1. None of the abortions performed in Scotland in 1995 resulted in the death of the pregnant woman.

Fire Service

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many fire fighters in the fire service in Scotland have had to retire through post-traumatic stress disorder, stress or depression arising from their job. [31350]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount of standard spending assessment per person for each of the new unitary authorities. [31165]

Mr. Kynoch: Standard spending assessments do not apply to Scotland. The equivalent figures are for Government-supported expenditure for which the information requested is as follows:

	[1] [2] [3]*GSE per person*
Aberdeen City	1,078
Aberdeenshire	1,063
Angus	1,057
Argyll and Bute	1,397
Scottish Borders	1,223
Clackmannanshire	1,121
West Dunbartonshire	1,344
Dumfries and Galloway	1,207
Dundee City	1,281
East Ayrshire	1,150
East Dunbartonshire	1,043
East Lothian	1,100
East Renfrewshire	1,026
City of Edinburgh	1,105
Falkirk	1,076
Fife	1,112
City of Glasgow	1,489
Highland	1,349
Inverclyde	1,292
Midlothian	1,146
Moray	1,146
North Ayrshire	1,156
North Lanarkshire	1,166
Perth and Kinross	1,066
Renfrewshire	1,164
South Ayrshire	1,123
South Lanarkshire	1,143
Stirling	1,214
West Lothian	1,151

[1] Population estimates for mid-1994 supplied by Registrar General for Scotland.

[2] GSE comprises grant-aided expenditure, plus allowances for: loan and leasing charges; expenditure on council tax benefit and housing benefit net of DSS subsidy; and, where applicable, expenditure on urban programme net of specific grant.

[3] The Islands Councils of Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles were unitary authorities prior to 1 April 1996.

Nature Conservation Payments

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the payments made to landowners by Scottish National Heritage for nature conservation purposes and access to their estates in each year since 1991. [30505]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 22 May 1996]:* Scottish Natural Heritage, which came into existence in 1992, makes payments to landowners in two ways, through management agreements and grants. Details of grant payments are listed in the annual reports of SNH, copies of which are in the Library of the House. A list of all management agreements was published in SNH's first annual report and new agreements are included in subsequent reports.

Cullen Inquiry

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will amend the terms of reference of the Cullen inquiry to include consideration of the depiction of murder on films, videos and television as a possible contributory cause of violent behaviour. [30510]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The terms of reference already allow the Inquiry to consider the issues arising from the tragic events at Dunblane primary school on 13 March, as well as the circumstances leading up to and surrounding these events.

Animal Feedstuffs

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Ministry for Agriculture Fisheries and Food *(a)* first evaluated and *(b)* first had access to a test for mammalian material in animal feedstuffs. [29913]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 May 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

The development of the ELISA test for bovine, ovine and porcine protein in ruminant feed has been a long-term project, based upon previous expertise in the identification of species of origin of meat. There were significant difficulties in purifying raw material to prevent interference by and cross reactions with many plant components of animal feed. Once resolved, there was a period of further validation based on the testing of feed samples collected on farm, commencing in June 1994. Additional testing of feed samples collected on farm, commencing in June 1994. Additional problems were identified, particularly relating to cross reactions with ingredients not previously tested, until the test was considered secure enough by mid-1995 to embark on surveillance at feed mills in compliance with Commission decision 95/287.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, columns 762–63, what consideration he has given to the issue addressed to him by the chairman of United Kingdom Families Flight 103, in a letter of 13 May, as to *(a)* whether the criminal investigation findings were reliable and complete and *(b)* whether there has been a fabrication of evidence to conceal certain matters therein set out. [30298]

The Prime Minister: My noble and learned Friend, the then Lord Advocate, concluded after the most intensive investigation in United Kingdom history that there was no evidence to support charges against the nationals of any other country. The alleged involvement of a Palestinian terrorist group was closely investigated during the early stages of the investigation, but no credible evidence emerged to substantiate its involvement in the Lockerbie crime. It is for a jury to decide how reliable the evidence is, but successive Lord Adovcates would not have brought and maintained charges if they had believed that the evidence on which they were based was unreliable, incomplete or fabricated.

Beef Ban

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Prime Minister what representations were made to the United States Government following their banning of British beef in 1989; what further negotiations have taken place since; and if he will make a statement. [31114]

The Prime Minister: It is not true that the United States authorities banned British beef in 1989. However, the USA has not accepted imports of bone in beef from Britain since 1989. After 1989, negotiations concentrated on securing access to US markets for boneless beef, which were successfully concluded in July 1994. Negotiations continue on securing wider access to the US markets, although in regular discussions with representatives of industry, the USA has not been identified as a priority market for the export of beef.

Kashmir

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make representations to the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir concerning the detention in Mirpur prison of Chazanfer Ali; and if he will make a statement. [31422]

The Prime Minister: As Ghazanfer Ali, a Pakistani national, has now been formally charged and has made appearances in court, it is now a matter for the Azad Kashmir authorities. It would not be appropriate for us to make further representations.

European Union Flag

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what instructions were issued to Government offices and agencies in respect of flying the European Union flag on 8 May; and if he will make a statement. [31515]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June. [30456]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 June [30457]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Security and Intelligence Services

Mr. Day: To ask the Prime Minister when the annual report of the commissioner appointed under the Security Service Act 1989 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [32004]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's sixth annual report for 1995 has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 4(6) of the Security Service Act 1989. The confidential annex to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 4(7) of the 1989 Act. I am grateful to the commissioner for his work in providing

assistance to the tribunal as provided in that Act and for reviewing the issue of warrants under the Intelligence Services Act 1994. I note that he is satisfied that the Secretaries of State have exercised their powers in accordance with the provisions of the 1994 Act.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Prime Minister when the annual report of the commissioner appointed under the Intelligence Services Act 1994 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [32005]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's first annual report, for 1995, has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 8(6) of the Intelligence Services Act 1994. The confidential annex to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 8(7) of the 1994 Act. I am grateful to the Commissioner for his work in reviewing the issue of warrants and authorisations, and in providing assistance to the tribunal as provided for in the Act. I note that he is satisfied that the Secretary of State has properly exercised his powers under the two sections of the 1994 Act.

Sir Jim Lester: To ask the Prime Minister when the annual report of the commissioner appointed under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [32006]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Nolan's annual report for 1995 has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 8(7) of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. The confidential annex to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 8(8) of the 1985 Act. I am grateful to the commissioner for his work in reviewing the issue of warrants and in providing assistance to the tribunal as provided for in the Act. I note in particular the commissioner's view that the interception of both postal and telecommunications remains both an effective and essential operation in the interests of national security and the economic well being of the United Kingdom, and the prevention and detection of serious crime.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

European History

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she proposes to take in response to recommendation 1283 (1996) of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe on history and the learning of history in Europe; and if she will make a statement. [31433]

Mr. Forth: The Government make the recommendation, much of which is reflected in the national curriculum. My officials, together with members of Ofsted and the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority will continue to contribute to the Council of Europe's meetings and projects on history teaching in Europe.

School Inspections

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations have been received *(a)* for and *(b)* against a six-yearly cycle of school inspections during the consultation on future inspection arrangements; when the results will be published; and if she will make a statement; [31017]

(2) what criteria will be used in assessing which schools will be inspected more frequently than the proposed six-yearly cycle; what proportion of schools she estimates will be affected; and if she will make a statement. [30996]

Mr. Robin Squire: Her Majesty's chief inspector is currently consulting educational interests on future inspection arrangements. Once I have his advice on the outcome, I will make a further statement.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what conclusions she has reached following the recent public consultation on an employment code of practice and employment regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if she will make a statement. [32063]

Mr. Paice: Over 670 replies were received from organisations and individuals by the close of the consultation period at the end of March. This was a welcome and helpful response.

Most respondents considered that the draft code could be improved in the way it gave guidance on the employment provisions in the Act and helped employers avoid discrimination in all areas of employment. There was also a great deal of support for the code to contain more illustrative examples. Although most respondents considered that the length of the draft was about right, the constructive comments they, and others, made could not be taken into account without substantial revision.

We have therefore arranged to lay before Parliament today a redrafted code of practice relating to the elimination of discrimination in the field of employment against disabled people and people who have had a disability. The code includes many illustrative examples and significant additional guidance about the employment provisions of the Act, as well as information about how complaints might be made and how to seek further information, and a comprehensive index. It should now meet the needs of organisations of all sizes covered by the Act's employment provisions.

The proposals for employment regulations were supported by a majority of those who expressed a view and only minor changes have been needed to deal with some issues which were identified during the consultation process. As a result, we have also laid before Parliament today the Disability Discrimination (Employment) Regulations 1996.

The consultation exercise also sought views on two issues for which we made no proposals for regulations but were interested in opinions about the merit of possible change. One issue was the setting of a financial cap for making a reasonable adjustment. A clear majority of those who expressed a view were not in favour of a cap, and the Department is not proposing to introduce one when employment provisions are commenced.

The other issue was whether the duty of reasonable adjustment should apply to aspects of physical features of buildings or extensions which meet the British standard 5810.

A clear majority of those who expressed a view considered it should apply and we do not propose to introduce regulations on this issue. Therefore no aspect of a building will be exempted from the duty of reasonable adjustment simply because it meets BS5810.

We have decided that the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will commence on 2 December 1996. The draft code of practice and the Disability Discrimination (Employment) Regulations 1996 will also commence on that date, subject to completion of the parliamentary procedure. The code will be published as soon as possible to give employers and others affected by the employment provisions time to take account of its guidance.

A statistical analysis of the responses to the consultation is being placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Schoolteachers (Qualifications)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 1 May, *Official Report,* column *552,* where he stated that 198 Irish schoolteachers had their qualifications recognised in Great Britain under EU rules in 1993–94, what assessment he has made of the number of recognitions cited in the European Commission's recent report on the implementation of the professional qualifications directive; and if he will make a statement. [31122]

Mr. Ancram: The 1,277 recognitions relate to the cumulative total for England and Wales since directive 89/48/EEC was implemented, whereas the 198 recognitions refer to 1993–94 and include Scotland.

School Transport

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) by how much school transport costs have risen in *(a)* cash, *(b)* real price and *(c)* percentage terms since the Government adopted a policy of open enrolment; [31030]

(2) what have been the percentage, cash and real terms changes in transport costs in the primary, secondary, further and special needs sectors of education since the adoption of a policy of open enrolment. [31031]

Mr. Ancram: Between the introduction of open enrolment policy in 1990 and March 1995—1994–95 is the latest year for which actual expenditure is available—net expenditure on school transport has risen by some 50 per cent. from £23.2 million in 1990–91 to £34.7 million. The equivalent figures in constant price terms are £26.4 million and £34.7 million respectively reflecting an increase of approximately 31 per cent. Separate costs are not readily available for primary, secondary, further and special needs sectors of education and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the principal factors underlying the change in school transport costs in the last five years. [31032]

Mr. Ancram: The principal factors are an increase in the total school population, an increase in the proportion of pupils attending schools beyond statutory walking distance and an increase in the cost of provision of such transport.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a breakdown of current education transport costs by made of transport. [31033]

Mr. Ancram: The latest year for which actual expenditure is available is 1994–95 and the information is as follows:

	£ million
Education and Library Board Vehicles	9.2
Public Transport	19.9
Taxi Services	3.8
Other	1.8
Total	34.7

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what extent the rise in education transport costs is due to increases in charges by transport companies. [31034]

Mr. Ancram: Increases in charges by public transport providers account for approximately 21 per cent. of the total cost increases for school transport in the period 1990–91 to 1994–95.

Education Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list his allocation of resources to each of the education and library boards in the current financial year; and what percentage increase this constitutes over the 1995 allocation in constant price terms. [31035]

Mr. Ancram: The total allocation to the education and library boards for 1996–97 is £963.3 million, an increase of 0.6 per cent. at constant prices over the allocations initially provided for 1995–96. Individual board allocations have not yet been finalised as the 1996–97 figure includes £28.5 million which is earmarked for specific purposes, and has not yet been distributed among the five boards. I will write to the hon. Member later in the year when directly comparable allocation figures are available.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state his allocation of resources to the schools which he directly funds; and what percentage increase this constitutes over the 1995 allocation in constant price terms. [31036]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested for the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 is set out in the table.

	1996–97 £	*Percentage increase (constant prices)*
Voluntary grammar schools	113,696,000	1.47
Grant maintained integrated schools		
Primary	4,366,000	16.43
Secondary	7,266,000	30.36

The 1996–97 figures for grant maintained integrated schools take account of three new secondary schools and one new primary school and increased enrolments in existing schools.

Law Reform Advisory Committee

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when the Law Reform Advisory Committee commenced work on the subject of landlord liability for failure to repair defective premises; what tenants interest groups it has consulted; and when it will issue its report; [31123]

(2) what factors led the Law Reform Advisory Committee to cease further work on actions arising out of insidious diseases; [31124]

(3) if it is the policy of the Law Reform Advisory Committee to make submissions to the Law Commission on areas of work in which it is interested; [31125]

(4) what is the policy of the Law Reform Advisory Committee in respect of when it addresses issues on which the Law Commission is working. [31128]

Sir John Wheeler: The Law Reform Advisory Committee is an independent non-statutory body whose remit is to keep the civil law of Northern Ireland under review and make recommendations for its reform to the Secretary of State. The committee operates within terms of reference and a programme of law reform which are approved by the Secretary of State. Within these parameters, the committee has an independence in policy matters and a discretion with regard to the working practices it adopts in pursuance of its remit. Accordingly, the advice of the chairman to the committee, the right hon. Lord Justice Carswell, has been sought on those aspects of the hon. and learned Gentleman's questions which refer to the committee's policy areas and detailed working practices.

The sub-committee dealing with the topic of landlord liability topic is at an early stage of the consultative process. It is not therefore possible to say at this stage when a report will be issued. The main committee decided to defer preparation of its report on actions arising out of insidious diseases until the Law Commission has completed discussions with the insurance industry on the remedies of plaintiffs against insurers.

The Law Reform Advisory Committee regards it as an important part of its work to consult the Law Commission regularly. It also considers the work of the Law Commission and decides which topics merit further consideration given the particular relevances to its jurisdiction.

Paedophiles Register

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ask the Home Secretary to include Northern Ireland from the beginning in legislation to set up a national register of convicted paedophiles. [31126]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government are considering suggestions that convicted sex offenders should be required by law to notify the police of any changes of address. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary intends to publish a consultation document shortly which will canvas views on this and other measures

At that time I will wish to seek views on the applicability of the proposals to Northern Ireland.

Balloo Road, Bangor

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the accident and casualty rates over the last five years on the Balloo road in Bangor; if he will give an assessment of the improvements required; and what are his Department's plans for upgrading that road. [31127]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 31 May 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about accident and casualty rates on the Balloo Road in Bangor and future improvement proposals for the road.

The RUC, who are responsible for compiling accident statistics, have advised me that in the 5 year period 1991–1995 inclusive 39 injury accidents in which 2 people were killed and 60 injured (7 seriously) were recorded in respect of the Balloo Road in Bangor.

Balloo Road is 2,200 metres long. The two end sections of the road, totalling some 1,400 metres have been reconstructed in the last 10 years at a cost of £1.5M. A scheme to bring the 800m central section up to a similar standard is included in the 6–15 year major roadworks programme where its priority will be assessed as part of a detailed review to be completed later this year. The work will involve reconstructing the carriageway to 9 m width with right turning lanes at 4 junctions, constructing footways on each side and installing traffic signals with a pedestrian facility at the Bloomfield Road South junction.

Peace Process

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on nominations to the forthcoming political negotiations, and about progress in setting up the forum established by the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. [32163]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have issued invitations to nominate teams to participate in the negotiations, under section 2(2) of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996, to the nominating representatives of the following parties:

Alliance Party
Democratic Unionist Party—DUP
Labour
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SLDP)
UK Unionist Party—Robert McCartney
Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

I am required by section 2(3) of the Act to refrain from inviting nominations in respect of any part if I consider that requirements set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the ground rules for substantive all-party negotiations—

published as Command Paper 3232—are not met in relation to it. Paragraph 9 of the ground rules makes clear the agreement of the British and Irish Governments that the participation of Sinn Fein in the negotiations requires the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994.

After consultation with the Irish Government, both Governments are agreed that this requirement is not met and that, for so long as it is not met, no invitation can be issued in respect of Sinn Fein.

Letters have also been sent to the nominating representatives of all parties returned at the elections, including Sinn Fein, about arrangements for the forum. With them is a draft of initial rules of procedure, on which we seek comment. The letters also deal with the location of the forum: we have now identified suitable premises for it at the Interpoint centre in Belfast. I am placing a copy of these letters in the Library of the House.

Hydro-electricity

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available to the representatives of Lough Neagh and Maine System Game Anglers Association details of the minutes of meetings which took place between the fisheries division of the Department of Agriculture, the energy policy division of the Department of Economic Development, the hydro-electric consultant Mr. Dougal Baillie and a turbine manufacturer based in the Province with regard to the Radalstown hydro-electric application. [31223]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* No meeting of these parties took place on this subject.

WALES

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from farming organisations concerning extensions of the 25p per kilo live weight supplementary payment until the 30-months slaughter scheme is fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [30700]

Mr. Hague: I have received a number of representations about the national supplement of 25p per kilogrammes live weight which beef specialists can receive under the over 30-month slaughter scheme.

The Government have extended the qualifying period for this rate until 15 June. Rates will be reviewed regularly thereafter in light of market rates for young cattle as EC regulations limit us to providing no more than the difference between 1 ecu per kilogramme and the market value.

If animals over 30 months of age on 20 March cannot be slaughtered before 15 June they will remain eligible for the top-up payments of 25p.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to introduce a system for consigning animals due to enter the cull scheme to specific collecting centres; and what proposals he has for making arrangements for the relevant interim payments. [30702]

Mr. Hague: The over 30-month slaughter scheme is being run by the intervention board executive agency. Arrangements for consigning cattle to collection centres are matters for those taking part in the scheme, who are best placed to consider their own needs and local circumstances.

I understand the producers will be asked to notify the board of all the animals on which they wish to claim interim payments before the end of June and that payments will be made in the first half of July.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current backlog of *(a)* steers and heifers over 30 months and *(b)* cull cows awaiting slaughter in each county in Wales. [30697]

Mr. Hague: Precise figures are not available. The total number of clean beef cattle and of cull cows aged over 30 months awaiting slaughter in Wales is estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the date on which producers will receive their interim payment on *(a)* steers and heifers and *(b)* cull cows awaiting slaughter. [30701]

Mr. Hague: The over 30-month slaughter scheme is being run by the intervention board executive agency. I understand that producers will be asked to notify the board of all the animals on which they wish to claim interim payments before the end of June and that payments will be made in the first half of July.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Welsh farming organisations concerning the introduction into Wales of the Scottish random selection system for allocation of animals to collection centres and for subsequent disposal; and if he will make a statement. [30703]

Mr. Hague: I have had a number of representations regarding the Scottish arrangements for allocation of cattle to selection centres. I understand that this has been organised by those taking part in the over 30-month scheme, who are best placed to consider local circumstances, and to decide priorities.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the introduction of a cataloguing system for farmers with steers and heifers in the pipeline for the slaughter under the 30 months and over slaughter scheme, to assist in the identification of eligible animals. [30699]

Mr. Hague: The over 30-month slaughter scheme is being run by the intervention board executive agency. Arrangements for consigning cattle to collection centres or abattoirs are matters for those taking part in the scheme, who are best placed to consider their own needs and local circumstances.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further initiatives he will take to ensure the efficient processing of cattle destined for slaughter under the 30-month BSE regulations; and if he will make a statement. [31134]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The over 30-month slaughter scheme is being run by the intervention board executive agency. Arrangements for consigning cattle to collection centres or abattoirs are matters for those taking part in the scheme, who are best placed to consider their own needs and local circumstances.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to increase rendering capacity in Wales. [30998]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Rendering capacity in Great Britain is being made available to all slaughterhouses operating as part of the 30-month slaughter scheme. We are actively considering a variety of options for increasing throughput of cattle under the scheme.

Abattoirs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to increase the number of abattoirs in Wales. [30999]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Investment in abattoir facilities remains essentially a matter for the commercial judgment of individual operators.

Care and Repair Schemes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Care and Repair Cymru; and if he will make a statement. [30751]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Representations have been received from Care and Repair Cymru in response to the consultation paper, "The Welsh Office and Local Government: Redefining the Relationship". The issue was also discussed at a recent meeting between my officials and the organisation's director.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has received concerning changes in its support for local care and repair schemes; and if he will make a statement. [30759]

Mr. Jones: The Welsh Office has received representations from Care and Repair Cymru, voluntary organisations including individual care and repair schemes, local authorities, housing associations and private individuals. These representations are being considered.

Dental Services

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists have left NHS service during the last year in *(a)* Torfaen, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales. [30980]

Mr. Hague: Information on the number of dentists who stop treating NHS patients is not available centrally. However, the number of dentists treating NHS patients in Gwent and Wales is shown in the following table. Separate information for Torfaen is not available centrally.

Number of dentists treating at least some NHS patients

	Gwent	*Wales*
At 31 December 1994	140	850
At 31 December 1995	141	856

GP Fundholding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the extra annual administrative costs of the general practitioner fundholding system in Wales. [31000]

Mr. Hague: Reimbursement to general practitioner fundholders in respect of expenses covered by management allowances since the inception of the scheme is as follows:

1990–91: £0.112 million
1991–92: £0.518 million
1992–93: £1.677 million
1993–94: £3.055 million
1994–95: £3.795 million

Expenditure figures for 1995–96 are not yet available, but provisional accounts suggest that the total sum amounted to some £6.7 million.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to ensure that the general practitioner fundholding system relates to health authority plans for local people. [31002]

Mr. Hague: Guidance on ensuring the accountability of GP fundholding practices was issued by the Welsh Office on 27 September 1995.

The guidance emphasised the need for GP fundholders and health authorities to develop partnerships to meet agreed national and local health priorities and to set out the main action required in the performance agreements between individual practices and authorities.

I have arranged for copies of the guidance to be placed in the Library of the House.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total. [30777]

Mr. Hague: The number of registered disabled staff employed by my Department is 33. This represents 1.4 per cent. of the total staff employed.

A further five registered disabled staff are employed in my Department under the sheltered placement scheme.

Pontypool Bypass

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on delays to work on the Pontypool bypass, A4042; and what penalties will be levied on the contractor. [30978]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The contractor, Shephard Hill Civil Engineering Ltd., has experienced three days' delay as a result of adverse weather.

Liquidated damages would be applied to the contract in the normal way for late completion.

Direct Grant Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many primary and secondary schools *(a)* are direct grant and *(b)* are seeking direct grant status; and if he will make a statement. [31132]

Mr. Hague: There are no longer any direct grant schools in Wales and, currently, no plans to seek applications.

School Health (Children)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a study of the condition of the teeth of primary and secondary school children in Wales with particular reference to the effects of the level of calcium in their diets. [31148]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to do so.

Beef Farmers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he will assist beef farmers in respect of cattle under 30 months old; and if he will make a statement. [31140]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes are available to assist beef producers. I have arranged for payments of subsidies to Welsh beef producer to be accelerated and over £66 million—representing 90 per cent. of livestock payments—was paid during April 1996. In addition, the Commission is recommending supplementary payments under these schemes which the Agriculture Council is considering this week.

Free School Milk

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the proportion of primary schools which are participating in the discretionary scheme for supplying school children under the age of five years with free school milk in each county or old county. [31155]

Mr. Hague: The EU school milk subsidy scheme is administered by the intervention board executive agency. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. G. Trevelyan, to reply direct to the hon. Member on this matter and will arrange for a copy to his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Farm Visits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farms and in what locations he has visited in 1996. [31133]

Mr. Hague: None. I visited a number of farms in 1995 and intend to do so again later this year.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on *(a)* the operation of the Government's measures in Wales to deal with the BSE crisis; and what assessment he has made of their effectiveness. [31081]

Mr. Hague: The Government have introduced a number of measures to assist those involved in the beef industry. These include direct support to renderers and abattoirs and schemes to remove older beef from the food chain and to help beef producers until the market recovers. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of these measures on the overall state of the industry.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many CTC colleges he proposes for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [31131]

Mr. Hague: I should be glad to consider an application to establish a CTC from any potential sponsor.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what restrictions European law places on the advertising of contracts for the supply of goods or services by local authorities though the medium of the Welsh language. [31145]

Mr. Hague: There are no restrictions on the advertising of contracts for the supply of goods or services by local authorities through the medium of Welsh. However, advertisements that are required to be placed in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* must be in one of the Community's official languages.

Youth Training

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the number of young people currently on youth training in each training and enterprise council area; and what were the equivalent figures in the last three years. [31358]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The figures requested are contained in the following table:

Numbers in training on youth training/youth credits/modern apprenticeships[1] at the end of March

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Gwent	2,429	2,861	2,449	2,418
Mid Glamorgan	2,503	3,420	3,192	3,522
North-east Wales	1,526	1,679	1,928	1,491
North-west Wales	2,166	2,053	1,946	1,928
Powys	672	653	694	639
South Glamorgan	1,721	1,622	1,754	1,880
West Wales	4,102	3,857	3,697	4,303
Wales total	15,119	16,145	15,660	16,181

[1] Includes accelerated and modern engineering apprenticeships.

European Union Flag

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what instructions were issued to his Department's offices and agencies in respect of flying the European Union flag on 8 May; and if he will make a statement. [31514]

Mr. Hague: None.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of standard spending assessment per person for each of the new unitary authorities. [31166]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information for the 1996–97 settlement is given in the following table. This information is also available in the "Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1996–97," a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Unitary	Standard spending assessment per head of population (£)[1]
Blaenau Gwent	880
Bridgend	822
Caerphilly	844
Cardiff	799
Carmarthenshire	878
Ceredigion	860
Conwy	814
Denbighshire	860
Flinshire	775
Gwynedd	910
Isle of Anglesey	889
Merthyr Tydfil	939
Monmouthshire	761
Neath Port Talbot	860
Newport	855
Pembrokeshire	880
Powys	950
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	866
Swansea	838
The Vale of Glamorgan	796
Torfaen	859
Wrexham	798
Wales	846

[1] The usually resident population at 30 June 1994 as estimated by the Registrar General.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Wasted Costs orders

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Attorney-General how many wasted costs orders have been made by courts against the Crown Prosecution Service in the last accounting year, with the breakdown of each Crown Prosecution Service area and the total sums for such areas and further broken down by the Crown courts and the magistrates courts. [28306]

The Attorney-General *[pursuant to his answer, 14 May 1996, c. 384–285]:* Information is now available about the number of costs awards against CPS central casework One such order was made in the magistrates courts and four in the Crown court. That answer also overstated the number of costs awards in the magistrates courts for the CPS Yorkshire area, by including some awards in favour of the CPS. The actual number of awards against the CPS was 11. An amended table is set out.

Costs awarded against CPS 1995–96

Area	Number of cost awards against CPS: Crown courts	Magistrate's courts	Amount paid £
North	2	19	3,102
Yorkshire	11	11	8,215
Mersey/Lancashire	11	6	3,259
Humber	9	6	22,827
North-west	5	14	9,363
East midlands	20	39	18,347
Wales	10	4	5,108
Midlands	9	7	7,503
Anglia	6	16	12,637
Severn/Thames	16	16	16,798
South-west	4	4	2,227

Costs awarded against CPS 1995–96

Area	Number of cost awards against CPS: Crown courts	Magistrate's courts	Amount paid £
London	111	95	63,804
South-east	13	26	19,528
Central casework	4	1	52,003
Total	231	264	244,721

1. Information is not available to establish the enactment under which the orders were made and awards of costs made otherwise than in accordance with the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 may be included.

2. The information in relation to the number of awards is limited to Crown courts and magistrates court cases. It does not include cost awards made in the higher court.

3. The number of awards relates to all cases dealt with by the CPS areas, but does not include any orders made in respect of the specialised work handled by central casework.

4. Information about the amounts actually paid includes payments in respect of orders made in the higher courts and those in respect of the specialised work handled by central casework, but the amounts paid cannot be broken down by type of court.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Eastwood Park Prison

14. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about Eastwood Park prison. [30276]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have received a number of letters from hon. Members and from members of the public about Eastwood Park and these were mainly about cell size.

Assaults on Prison Officers

15. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officer hours were lost during the financial year 1995–96 due to injuries sustained as a result of assaults by prisoners; and what was the estimated cost to the Prison Service. [30277]

Miss Widdecombe: Absence by prison officers due to assaults on duty is recorded in terms of days rather than hours lost. The total number of days lost for this reason was 11,788 in 1995–96. The cost to the Prison Service is £543,150.

Identity Cards

16. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a nationwide identity card scheme. [30280]

Mr. Sackville: We will announce our final decision on identity cards as soon as possible based on the options set out in the Green Paper published last year.

Ministerial Visits (Prisons)

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ministerial visits have been made to prisons int he last 12 months. [30282]

Miss Widdecombe: Since 6 June 1995, Home Office Minsters have visited Prison Service establishments on 75 occasions.

Fake Guns

18. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on fake guns. [30283]

Mr. Maclean: There are strict law against the misuse of imitation firearms and the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994 further strengthened the law. The Government's evidence to Lord Cullen's inquiry into the events at Dunblane discusses controls on imitation firearms and we shall take account of any comments Lord Cullen makes.

Firearms

19. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review his Department's policy in respect of the issue of *(a)* shotgun and *(b)* other firearm licences to those aged under 18 years. [30286]

Mr. Maclean: Lord Cullen's inquiry into the circumstances of the tragedy at Dunblane will also examine wider issues including the controls on firearms. On 21 March the Government announced a review of firearms controls in Great Britain. As part of that review, the Government have provided detailed evidence to Lord Cullen's inquiry. Any changes to the firearms controls must await the outcome of that inquiry.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

20. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on employment of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [30287]

Miss Widdecombe: We believe that the Asylum and Immigration Bill will improve employment opportunities for people lawfully resident in the United Kingdom and entitled to work here.

Euro 96

21. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources are being made available to the Metropolitan police in respect of crowd control during Euro 96. [30288]

Mr. Maclean: Policing outside football grounds is part of normal police duties, and costs are met from existing resources. The cost of policing inside the stadia will be met by the Football Association.

Police tactics for Euro 96 include the use of modern technology to transmit quickly to the regional centres photographic images of those involved in any disorder. The Football Trust is meeting the cost of this equipment, which is being made available close to the grounds hosting matches, in New Scotland Yard and in the national criminal intelligence service football unit.

Youth Justice System

22. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will bring forward plans to reform the youth justice system. [30289]

Mr. Maclean: The Government's priority is to ensure the effective implementation of the range of positive initiatives and changes that are already in hand to help tackle juvenile crime.

Life Sentences

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are at present imprisoned for life; and what were the comparable totals 10 and 20 years ago. [30268]

Mr. Howard: On 30 April, there were 3,436 life sentence prisoners in prison in England and Wales. The corresponding figures for mid-1976 and 1986 were 1,181 and 2,194 respectively.

Betting and Gambling

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place the green seal service on a statutory basis. [30829]

Mr. Kirkhope: No. *The Sporting Life* green seal service is a useful independent arbitrator on disputed bets. We consider that these should continue to be dealt with by voluntary regulation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the regulatory framework for gambling. [30279]

Mr. Kirkhope: The present framework has kept gambling well-ordered and crime free but we believe there is scope to reduce unnecessary regulation. We have proposed changes for casinos, bingo clubs and advertising of commercial gambling; and we are considering the position of the pools.

Secure Units

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to speed up the provision of secure units for young offenders. [30278]

Mr. Maclean: We are pressing ahead with the provision of secure training centres and the first of the extra 170 additional places being financed by the Department of Health came on stream in December. Around 103 more will be provided during this year.

Scott Report

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's conclusions in respect of Sir Richard's Scotts' recommendations on prosecution procedures. [32164]

Mr. Maclean: Sir Richard made eight recommendations concerning prosecution procedures. In essence, the recommendations are intended to ensure that in future the prosecution ascertains whether there are any documents held by other Government Departments and agencies which may be not only relevant to the way it proposes to put its case, but which may also be relevant

to the way in which the defence proposes to put the case for the accused, so far as it is known or can be inferred. They also seek to ensure that satisfactory arrangements are in place for recording what is done by the prosecution in this regard—and the responses to their requests of other departments and agencies—and reporting all of this to the defence.

The recommendations are based on the existing law on disclosure but, as Sir Richard recognised, they need to be considered against the provisions in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill, which is awaiting Report stage. The Government believe that the more focused and clearer duties established by the provisions in the Bill and the code of practice, to be promulgated under part II of the Bill, will address Sir Richard's concerns. To the extent that Sir Richard's recommendations are not already met by the provisions in the Bill, the Government have sought to identify what further action may be necessary.

Part II of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill provides that the Secretary of State shall prepare a code of practice for the police designed to secure that information obtained in the course of a criminal investigation and which may be relevant to it is recorded, retained and revealed to the prosecutor for a decision on disclosure. Investigators other than the police will have to comply with any provisions of the code that are relevant to them. The Government have concluded that the draft code of practice should be amended to emphasise the duty on the investigator to explore all reasonable lines of inquiry, including those which might point away from the suspect.

The Government are preparing guidance booklets on disclosure for Government Departments and Crown servants. The purpose of these booklets is to give guidance on the procedures that should be followed concerning information which may be relevant to the investigation or prosecution of a criminal offence, and advice on the proper response to requests from investigators, prosecutors or the defence. This guidance will, of course, take account of Sir Richard's recommendations, as well as the provisions in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill.

Finally, the Director of Public Prosecutions is reviewing the guidance that she gives to the Crown Prosecution Service on the proper application of the code of crown prosecutors, to ensure that the guidance emphasises the importance of the prosecutor considering whether there are any further reasonable lines of inquiry which in his view should be pursued. Similarly, other departmental prosecuting authorities will review and, where necessary, prepare equivalent guidance for other Government prosecutors.

We have placed a paper in the Library, giving a more detailed account of the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's recommendations on prosecution procedures.

Prisoners (HIV/AIDS)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners have been infected with HIV while in prison in England and Wales; [30231]

(2) how many inmates currently are HIV positive or have AIDS in prisons in England and Wales; [30232]

(3) how many cases of HIV and AIDS have been reported in United Kingdom prisons for each year since 1991. [30233]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Robert Key, dated 6 June 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about prisoners who are HIV positive or have AIDS.

There has been only one recorded case of a prisoner being infected with HIV while in prison in England and Wales.

On 21 May 1996, 80 prison inmates were known to be HIV positive or to have AIDS in prisons in England and Wales.

The following table lists cases of HIV and AIDS reported in prisons in England and Wales since 1991. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland can be requested from the Secretaries of State for those Departments.

Year	*New cases*
1991	26
1992	40
1993	20
1994	23
1995	33

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Incineration

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle were slaughtered and destroyed by incineration on their farms during each week of the last foot and mouth disease outbreak in 1967–68. [30023]

Mrs. Browning: This information cannot be supplied in the form requested without incurring disproportionate costs. However, I can confirm that 211,825 cattle were slaughtered during the eight months of the 1967–68 foot and mouth disease epidemic. The normal practice in such cases is for the carcases to be buried or incinerated on farm to minimise the possibility of spreading the virus.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figure. [30775]

Mr. Boswell: At 1 April 1996 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including its agencies, employed 145 members of staff who had declared that they were registered disabled. This equates to 1.4 per cent. of the total staff employed.

Pennington Sewage Treatment Plant

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to

Southern Water Services in relation to the discharges from Pennington sewage treatment plant and its impact on local shellfish. [31167]

Mr. Boswell: In 1994 the Department responded to statutory consultations by the National Rivers Authority relating to discharges from Pennington sewage treatment plant.

The Department has made no representations on this subject to Southern Water Services.

Livestock Collection Centres

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which EU-approved markets and collection centres he had notified on or before 1 May to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the central authorities of other EU member states as required by European Council directive 64/432/EEC. [30718]

Mrs. Browning: In addition to the collection centres listed in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1165*, the following collection centres in Great Britain had been notified to the European Commission and central authorities of other EU member states on or before 1 May 1996:

Norton and Brooksbank sale centre, Sleastonhowe, Kirkby Thore, Penrith, Cumbria

Oliver and Son Ltd., New Market road, Edinburgh.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many checks were carried out by his staff on holdings, as defined in European directive 90/425/EEC *(a)* during 1995 and *(b)* between January and April 1996; [30715]

(2) if he will list the holdings in Great Britain that have been checked by MAFF in accordance with the requirements of European directive 90/425/EEC. [30714]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* Ministry personnel carry out many different types of checks at establishments which fall within the definition of a holding laid down in directive 90/425. Records of visits made are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sharks

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what available data the EC quota of 100 tonnes of basking shark liver oil is based; what assessment he has made of whether the level of exploitation is sustainable; and if he will make a statement; [31330]

(2) if he will list the fisheries for basking sharks in United Kingdom waters. [31336]

Mr. Baldry: There is no EU quota for basking sharks. However, as part of the EU-Norway agreement Norwegian fishermen have a quota of 100 tonnes of basking shark liver in United Kingdom waters. The quota figure is based on historic catch levels. It has been reducing over the years from 800 tonnes in 1977 to 400 tonnes in 1988 and to the present 100 tonnes in 1991.

The very limited Norwegian uptake presents no threat to basking sharks in UK waters.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the yearly catch for basking sharks under the EC-Norwegian agreement for each of the last five years. [31331]

Mr. Baldry: European Commission data indicate that Norwegian fishermen caught 5.8 tonnes of basking shark liver in 1993 against their annual quota of 100 tonnes under the EU-Norway agreement. No catches were recorded in the years 1991, 1992, 1994 or 1995.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data are collated by his Department on the landings in the United Kingdom of individual shark species; and what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of introducing a quota management system to log landings for shark species to support the convention on international trade in endangered species resolution 9.17. [31333]

Mr. Baldry: The Ministry records landings into the United Kingdom of a large number of commercially important fish species as well as of a number of species of shark and shark-like species not considered to be commercially important. The species of the latter which are currently recorded are angel shark, kitefin shark, leafscale gulper shark, great lantern shark, greater spotted dogfish, lesser spotted dogfish, spurdog, birdbeak dogfish, Portuguese dogfish, longnose velvet dogfish and knifetooth dogfish. Other shark and shark-like species are recorded under more general headings.

Sharks are not included in the convention on international trade in endangered species. However, in response to evidence of increased trade in sharks CITES resolution 9.17 commissioned research on the impact of trade on shark populations. The UK has complied with the obligations of resolution 9.17 by providing the CITES animals committee with information on trade in sharks and the biological status of sharks in UK waters. Additionally, the Department of the Environment has contributed funding of £15,000 towards the cost of research by the shark specialist group of the world conservation union.

Because shark catches in UK waters are low there is not sufficient justification for the establishment of a quota management system.

Fisheries

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC-Norwegian agreement in relation to the exchange opportunities for fisheries. [31332]

Mr. Baldry: As I said following the December 1995 Fisheries Council, the United Kingdom has large quotas at north Norway and we secured them for 1996 at the same level as in 1995.

Gelatine

Ms Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the food products which contain gelatine of beef origin. [24953]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 April 1996]:* This information is not centrally recorded and cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

Beef Ban

Ms Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which banned the import of British beef prior to the EU ban and the date the ban came into force in each case. [26021]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 April 1996]:* In the week prior to the adoption of Commission decision 96/239/EC on 27 March the following EU countries imposed unilateral bans or restrictions on imports of British beef: Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Italy.

With regard to non-EU countries, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 16 May, *Official Report* columns 579–80.

Cattle Records

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he last met representatives of National Milk Records to discuss investment in a computerised record system tracing cattle by genetic imprint; [30711]

(2) what proposals there are for more investment in the National Milk Records cattle-tracing system; and if he will make a statement. [30712]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* MAFF officials are in touch with National Milk Records about the future development of the NMR cattle recording system. I understand that an NMR working group is preparing proposals for extending the existing NMR database and I look forward to receiving these later this year.

Export Certificates

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if export certificate EC400 has been issued by his Department since October 1980 for calves destined for France, in excess of 15 days of age. [30727]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* Yes; certificate EC400 was used to certify calves under the age of 42 days.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when divisional veterinary managers were notified that export certificate EC4000 is no longer to be issued; and what reasons were given. [30726]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer on 4 June 1996]:* The Ministry does not have an export certificate EC4000. An instruction to divisional veterinary managers to withdraw all export health certificates in respect of live cattle, including EC400, was issued on 27 March 1996. This was in response to ratification by the European Commission of Commission decision 96/239/EC on emergency measures to protect against bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 June 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Conservation of Seals Act 1970

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the Conservation of Seals Act 1970; and if he will make a statement. [31299]

Mr. Sackville: The Government's policy on conservation of seals is kept under review. There are no plans to amend the 1970 Act.

Explosives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make it illegal to explain how to make explosives; and if he will make a statement. [31429]

Mr. Maclean: No. There are legitimate users of explosives who make them up themselves and require information on how to do so safely. A person who makes explosives for any unlawful purpose commits a serious offence under the Explosive Substances Act 1883. It is an offence under the Control of Explosives Regulations 1991 to acquire or keep explosives without a certificate from the police.

Clean Air Acts (Prosecutions)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in each year since 1979 for actions contravening the clean air legislation and regulations concerning smoke controlled areas. [31108]

Mr. Maclean: It is not possible from the information held centrally by my Department to identify offences relating to smoke controlled areas from other summary offences under the Clean Air Acts 1956 and 1968.

The table shows the number of prosecutions for air pollution offences under the two Acts from 1979 to 1994 (latest available).

It should be noted that the statistics of court proceedings are based on returns made by the police to the Home Office. Although they include offences where there has been no police involvement, such as prosecutions instigated by Government Departments—in this case local authorities—private organisations and individuals, the reporting of this type of offence is known to be incomplete.

Number of prosecutions for offences under the Clean Air Acts 1956 and 1968, 1979 to 1994
Clean Air Acts 1956 and 1968

England and Wales

	Offences relating to public health as caused by air pollution
1979	133
1980	131
1981	134
1982	145
1983	132
1984	202
1985	143
1986	127
1987	100
1988	128
1989	146
1990	152
1991	156
1992	108
1993	95
1994	82

ENVIRONMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1), pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, column *710*, how much his Department estimated it would have cost to provide the information requested; [31453]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *694*, how much his Department estimated it would have cost to provide the information requested. [31449]

Sir Paul Beresford: More than £450, the current threshold above which answers are deemed to incur disproportionate cost.

Thamesmead Town Ltd.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding service charges to tenants of Thamesmead Town Ltd.; and if he will make a statement. [31946]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State received a letter from Greenwich council's housing (private sector) sub-committee on 17 May. The issues raised are under consideration and I will copy my response to the hon. Member in due course. I shall not be making a statement to the House.

Pennington Sewage Treatment Plant

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the secondary biological treatment plant at Pennington is equipped with ultra violet disinfection equipment by Southern Water Services. [31770]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 6 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *505–506*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

SHL Software

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the contracts his Department and his agencies have with SHL software computer system; what is the current cost; when each contract ends; what are the penalties involved should he seek early termination of the contract; and if he will make a statement. [31438]

Mr. Willetts: My Department does not have any contracts with SHL software computer system.

State Papers

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in his initiative to release blocks of state papers when requested by historians; how many records have been released under this initiative; what subjects the released records cover; if all these records have been released to the public record office; and if he will make a statement. [31320]

Mr. Freeman: Good progress has been made with the reviewing and releasing of records since my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), then the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, announced on 25 June 1992, that he was inviting historians to suggest blocks of records withheld by the Government which should be considered for release as part of the Government's initiative on openness.

More than 53,000 records have been released in the Public Record Office, Kew as a result of the openness initiatives, including those released in response to historians' requests and the review by Government Departments of all over-30-year-old material in accordance with the provisions of the White Paper on open government, Cm 2290, published in July 1993.

The records that have been released over a wide variety of subjects. It would be disproportionately costly to list them all, but they include, for example, wartime Cabinet records, Joint Intelligence Committee minutes and memorandums, papers relating to the trial and execution of Roger Casement and the Invergordon mutiny, and previously withheld records relating to Suez.

In addition, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has released four batches of records from the special operations executive—SOE—archive relating to SOE's activities in Scandinavia, the far east, the middle east and eastern Europe.

Government Departments continue to re-review withheld records and to respond to requests from historians and others. As a result of these initiatives, many more records are expected to be released in the coming months.

DEFENCE

Small-arms Weapons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each of the armed services, for each of the last four years, the number of small-arms weapons that have been declared surplus to requirements. [31426]

Mr. Soames: Our records are not maintained in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the total number of small arms declared surplus to requirements over the last four years is 235,200, of which 44,300 await disposal.

European Union Flag

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions were issued to his Department's offices and agencies in respect of flying the European Union flag on 8 May; and if he will make a statement. [31502]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 6 June by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Official Report*, column *518*.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery Grants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each parliamentary constituency, the organisations which have received grants from the national lottery and their amounts. [31218]

Mr. Sproat: This information is not held centrally. The Department of National Heritage is currently developing a lottery database that will make these figures available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UNESCO

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK observer to UNESCO will attend the 12th meeting of the Secretaries-General of UNESCO Commissions in the European region in Stockholm from 8 to 12 June. [31623]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The UK observer to UNESCO will not be attending this meeting.

EU Council

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union. [32173]

Mr. David Davis: The following Councils are scheduled:

3 June: ECOFIN

3 June: Agriculture

3 June: Social Affairs

4 June: Agriculture

4 June: Social Affairs

4 June: Justice and Home Affairs

5 June: Justice and Home Affairs

10 June: Fisheries

10 June: General Affairs Council

11 June: Fisheries

11 June: General Affairs Council

11 June: Culture/Audiovisual

17 June: Transport

18 June: Transport

21 June: European Council

22 June: European Council

24 June: Agriculture

25 June: Agriculture

25 June: Environment

26 June: Environment

26 June: Research (to be confirmed)

27 June: Telecommunications

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

3 June: Economic and Finance—ECOFIN

Approval of the agenda;

Approval of the "A";

Preparation for European Council in Florence;

—broad economic guidelines for 1996–97;

—progress report on preparation for stage 3 of European monetary union;

—appointment of president of the European Monetary Institute;

—interim report on employment;

Excessive deficits procedure.

European Investment Bank lending to Asia and Latin America.

VAT—taxation of agricultural outputs.

Any other business:

—Jordan (possible item);

—preview of the Irish presidency;

—financial repercussions of Commission's BSE measures;

—revision of the financial perspective.

3–4 June: Agriculture Council

Adoption of the agenda;

Approval of the list of "A" points (possible item);

Beef and veal:

—proposal for a Council decision amending Commission decision 96/239/EC on emergency measures to protect against bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)[1]

—implementation of paragraph 7 of the conclusions of the Agriculture Council on 29 and 30 April 1996 (support measures in the beef and veal sector).

Fruit and vegetables:

—proposal for a Council regulation to the common; organisation of the market in fruit and vegetables[1];

—proposal for a Council regulation on the common organisation of the market in processed fruit and vegetables[1];

Any Other Business:

—organisation of future work.

[1]Denotes item on which a vote may be requested.

3–4 June: Social Affairs Council

Approval of the agenda;

Approval of the list of "A" points;

Adoption of parental leave directive (likely "A" point);

Adoption of posted workers directive (likely "A" point);

Council recommendation on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making (likely "A"point);

Essen follow up: interim report in employment for Florence European Council;

Follow up to Peking UN conference on women;

Draft decision on a European year against racism (1997);

Draft resolution on the transparency of training certificates (possible item);

Orientation debate on the Commission communication on information and consultation (possible item);

Commission report on the demographic situation;

Commission information on the state of play on the two social protocol dossiers: burden of proof; and part-time, fixed-time and temporary work;

Any Other Business:

Presidency information on the French memorandum for a European social model;

Joint lunchtime discussion with ECOFIN Ministers about the employment situation.

4–5 June: Justice and Home Affairs Council

Draft external frontiers convention: progress report;

Draft recommendation on combatting illegal employment of third country nationals;

Eurodac: progress report;

Europol drugs unit: report on 1995 budget, draft 1997 budget, computer system;

Terrorism: draft joint action on directory of competences, threat assessment report, statistics of racist offences;

International Law Enforcement Academy;

Relations with third countries;

Crime prevention: results of Stockholm seminar;

Draft resolution on priorities for co-operation 1996 to 1998;

Financing of title VI;

European Court of Justice jurisdiction in Europol and other third pillar conventions;

Draft extradition convention;

Fraud: draft corruption convention and second protocol to convention on protection of Community's financial interests;

Draft convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters: progress report;

Draft convention on service of documents;

Common position on draft Hague convention on protection of minors;

Accession of a new member states to Brussels (and Rome) convention(s).

10–11 June: Fisheries Council

Adoption of the agenda

Approval of the list of "A" points (possible item)

Proposal for a Council regulation laying down for 1996 certain conservation and management measures for fishery resources in the technical area of the convention as defined in the convention on future multilateral co-operation in the north-east Atlantic Fisheries (allocation of the NEAFC Redfish quota)[1];

Proposal for a Council regulation amending for the second time regulation (EC) No. 3090/95 laying down for 1996 certain conservation and management measures for the fishery resources in the regulatory area as defined in the convention on future multilateral co-operation in the north west Atlantic fisheries (allocation of the NAFO 3M Redfish quota)[1];

Proposal for a council regulation amending regulation (EC) No. 3074/95 fixing, for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, the total allowable catches for 1996 and certain conditions under which they may be fished (sprat fisheries in the Skagerrak and Kattegat)[1];

European fisheries research: further discussions;

Proposal for a Council regulation on technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources: presentation by the Commission;

Multiannual guidance programmes 1997–99: communication from the Commission;

Communication on the organisation of the second conference on the management of fishery resources in the Mediterranean (Venice, November 1996);

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on small-scale Coastal fishing (budget heading B2-521);

Proposals for the conclusion of fisheries agreements with:

— Estonia;

— Latvia;

— Lithuania;

(possible items)

FAO: proposal for a Council decision on accession of the European Community to the agreement to promote compliance with international conservation and management measures by fishing vessels on the high seas[1] (possible item);

Proposal for a Council decision on the signature of the agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the conservation and management of straddling stocks and highly migratory fish stocks[1] (possible item);

Report from the Commission on the establishment of a system for monitoring community fishing vessels by satellite: presentation by the Commission (possible item);

Proposal for a Council regulation amending regulation (EEC) No. 2847/93 establishing a control system applicable to the common fisheries policy: presentation by the Commission (possible item);

Proposal for a Council regulation amending for the 4th time regulation (EEC) No. 3699/93 laying down the criteria and arrangements regarding community structural assistance in the fisheries and aquaculture sector and the processing and marketing of its products (possible item);

Commission report on the activities of third countries in Community waters

Adoption in the language of the Community of:

—a Council regulation amending Council regulation (EC) No. 3078/95 allocating, for 1996, certain catch quotas between member states for vessels fishing in Faroese waters[1];

—a Council regulation amending Council regulation (EC) No 3077/95 laying down, for 1996, certain measures for the conservation and management of fishery resources applicable to vessels flying the flag of the Faroe Islands[1];

adoption in the official languages of the community of a council regulation amending council regulation (EC) No. 3090/95 laying down, for 1996, certain conservation and management measures for fishery resources in the regulatory area as defined in the convention on future multilateral co-operation in the north-west Atlantic fisheries[1];

Any Other Business:

—situation on the salmon market (requested by the Irish delegation);

—organisation of future work.

[1]Denotes items on which a vote may be taken.

10–11 June: General Affairs Council

Provisional agenda is as follows:

—Mediterranean policy:

—follow-up to Barcelona;

—decision to conclude Euro-Med association agreements;

—MEDA regulation;

Relations with Syria: common position for Co-operation Council (likely "A" Point);

Preparation of Florence European Council;

EEA: common position for EEA Council (likely "A" Point);

Relations with Chile (likely "A" Point);

Preparation of EU/Turkey Association Council (possible item);

Former Yugoslavia;

Agricultural GSP (possible item);

Commercial questions;

—Maritime transport;

—Commission communication on market access (preparation for Singapore);

Niger;

EU/Africa summit;

Relations with Canada;

Middle east peace process;

Relations with US;

KEDO (possible item);

New council building.

11 June: Culture/Audiovisual Council

Approval of the draft agenda;

Approval of the list of "A" points;

Proposal for a directive modifying directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989 "Television without Frontiers": draft common position;

Proposal for a Council decision setting up a European guarantee fund to encourage cinema and television production: state of work;

Preparation of joint work between the Council and the PECO countries;

Proposal for a Council decision establishing an action programme in the field of cultural heritage (RAPHAEL): draft common position;

Cultural goods: proposal for a Council Regulation modifying the annex of Council Regulation No. 3911/92 on the export of cultural goods, and proposal for a EP/Council directive modifying the annex of directive 93/7/CEE on the return of cultural goods unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State;

Access to culture for all: draft resolution;

Electronic publishing and libraries: draft resolution;

First report of the Commission on the consideration of cultural aspects in European Community action: general debate;

Any Other Business:

— prize for politically persecuted authors (Austrian delegation);

— encouragement of access of the young to culture: lowering of VAT on records, CDs and tapes (French delegation).

17–18 June: Transport Council

Trans-European network transport guidlines (possible item);

Aviation relations with the US: adoption of mandate;

Negotiations with Switzerland on air and land transport: Commission report;

Negotiations with EUROCONTROL and ESA on global satellite navigation: adoption of mandate;

Commission White Paper on air traffic management: debate;

Proposed amendment to driving licences directive: harmonisation of codes: political agreement on common position;

Proposed directive on summertime: political agreement on common position;

Commission Green Paper on fair and efficient pricing in transport: debate;

Commission Green Paper on the citizen's network: debate;

Commission document on maritime strategy: debate

Proposed directive on safety rules for passenger ships: political agreement on common position.

21–22 June: European Council

Agenda not yet available;

24–25 June: Agriculture Council

Reform of the fruit and vegetable regime;

Price fixing;

Bananas (possible item);

Set-aside rates for 1997–98 (possible item);

Amending directive 64/432 on intra-community trade in bovine animals and swine;

Plant health: solidarity and responsibility (possible item);

Veterinary and fish fees;

Italian memorandum on the single market in veterinary matters;

BSE (possible item).

25–26 June: Environment Council

Biocides: adoption of a common position;

Emissions from off-road vehicles: adoption of a common position;

5th action programme: orientation debate;

Climate change: conclusions;

Convention on biological diversity: state of play;

Biosafety protocol: conclusions;

Water policy: debate;

Auto-oil programme proposals: presentation;

Leghold traps (mandate): adoption (if not already done);

Leghold traps: debate;

CO^2 emissions: conclusions;

Genetically modified organisms (revision of 90/219): state of play;

Zoos: debate;

Trade/Environment (at lunch);

Mandates if necessary;

2nd reading (landfill/air quality/PCB/IPPC/Vans/Logo "CE"/LIFE);

Transfer of waste to non-OECD countries: state of play;

Ant other business;

—Structured dialogue (Cyprus/Malta): information by the presidency.

26 June: Research Council (to be confirmed)

Proposals for decisions adapting the 4th RTD framework Programme (EC) and the EURATOM research framework programme (1994–1998): financial supplement;

Green Paper on innovation: information from the Commission;

S/T co-operation with Mediterranean third countries: information from the presidency;

S/T co-operation agreement with USA: adoption of negotiating mandate (possible "A" point);

Decision modifying the specific programme on RTD co-operation with third countries and international organisations (INTAS) (possible "A" point);

Supplementary research programme on the high flux reactor (HRF) (possible "A" point).

27 June: Telecommunications Council

Directive on a common framework for general authorisations and individual licences in the field of telecommunications services: common position;

Directive on common rules for the development of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service: common position;

Directive on the processing of personal data and protection of personal privacy in the telecommunications sector, in particular ISDN and digital mobile networks: common position;

Directive amending ONP directives 90/387 and 92/44 to adapt them to a competitive environment in telecommunications: common position (possible item);

Decision on the adoption of a multi-annual programme to promote linguistic diversity in the information society: decision (possible item);

Council Resolution on the development of universal service for telecommunications in the EU.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Prospects Scheme

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the prospects scheme for unemployed people aged over 40 years; and what are the principal sources of funding for the scheme. [31826]

Mr. Forth: Prospects is the name given on Merseyside to a pilot, led by Knowsley metropolitan borough council, aimed at identifying any new sources of jobs arising from social and economic change. It will run for 18 months from January 1996.

The pilot is funded by the European Union. Similar pilots are being run in 15 other member states.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 7 May concerning the Construction Industry Training Board which was transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry to her Department. [31575]

Mr. Paice: A reply was sent on 5 June.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average length of time hon. Members have had to wait for a reply from the chief executive of the Student Loans Company to parliamentary questions that her Department refers to him to answer; and if she will make a statement. [31484]

Mr. Forth: I understand that the average length of time taken by the Student Loans Company to reply to parliamentary questions tabled during the past 12 months has been seven days.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) pursuant to her answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *516*, when the hon. Member can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Student Loans Company; [31494]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 1 May, *Official Report*, column *539*, when the hon. Member can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Students Loans Company. [31441]

Mr. Forth: I understand that the chief executive has now written to the hon. Member, as requested.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of money paid to date to the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC to assist with social and economic regeneration in respect of the pit closure programme; and *(a)* how much has been spent to-date and *(b)* on what scheme. [31424]

Mr. Paice: Over the three financial years 1993–94 to 1995–96, a total of £6.9 million pounds has been paid to the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council to support the range of activities agreed between the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside and the TEC under the local coal plan.

The moneys were used by the TEC to extend and enhance the provision of adult training, business start-up and business support services available to communities that were affected by colliery closures. In addition, a number of local initiatives were developed, using the funding provided, to increase the range of local education, training and employment advisory and guidance services available to those who required help.

Other Government funding available to the TEC will also have benefited those areas directly affected by colliery closure.

Additional Educational Needs Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will *(a)* list the change in 1996–97 education standard spending assessment (i) in cash, (ii) as a percentage of total standard spending assessment and (iii) in pounds per pupil aged five to 18 years for each education authority and by class, arising from her decision to reverse the policy of increasing allowances for additional educational needs and free school meals in line with increases in the number of children of income support claimants and *(b)* rank each authority in descending order in terms of cash lost per pupil; [31051]

(2) if she will list the representations from local authorities to date *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against her decision to reverse the policy of increasing additional educational needs allowances and free school meals in line with increases in the number of children of income support claimants; and if she will make a statement; [31052]

(3) if she will list the proportion of education standard spending assessment distributed by the additional educational needs index *(a)* in 1990–91, *(b)* in 1995–96 and *(c)* in 1996–97 for each education sub-block and in total. [30997]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is set out in the tables. Options setting out different ways of calculating the allowances in the schools standard spending assessment—SSA—sub-blocks for additional educational needs and free school meals were presented to the local authority associations last year for consultation. The option chosen was to reset the allowances at the levels derived from the 1993 review of standard spending assessments. The option chosen is supported by the Association of County Councils and opposed by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of London Government. To date, I have received representations from two local authorities opposing the option chosen.

Proportion of education standard spending assessments distributed by the additional educational needs index

SSA Sub-block	*1990–91* *Per cent.*	*1995–96* *Per cent.*	*1996–97* *Per cent.*
Primary	20.0	17.4	15.7
Secondary	20.0	17.4	15.7
Post-16	18.0	17.5	16.5
Under fives	70.0	37.5	37.5
Other	70.0	62.9	63.4
Total	24.5	20.9	19.3

Table of results

Local Education Authority	*1* *1996–97 Education SSA £ million*	*2* *Cash difference £ million*	*3* *Percentage difference in SSA Percentage*	*4* *Actual 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*5* *Adjusted 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*6* *Change in 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*
Tower Hamlets	122.839	–2.599	–2.1	3,547	3,633	–86
Hackney	92.084	–1.624	–1.8	3,504	3,579	–75
Lambeth	100.826	–1.687	–1.7	3,542	3,618	–75
Southwark	109.297	–1.830	–1.7	3,343	3,411	–68
Islington	81.095	–1.281	–1.6	3,320	3,383	–63
Haringey	93.427	–1.567	–1.7	3,060	3,122	–61
Camden	78.312	–1.147	–1.5	3,318	3,376	–58
Newham	130.381	–2.118	–1.6	3,036	3,093	–57
Hammersmith and Fulham	56.047	–0.733	–1.3	3,271	3,324	–53
Lewisham	108.942	–1.410	–1.3	3,244	3,294	–50
Manchester	188.261	–2.938	–1.6	2,689	2,738	–49
Brent	109.692	–1.492	–1.4	3,018	3,066	–48
Greenwich	114.263	–1.357	–1.2	3,177	3,220	–43
Westminster	58.134	–0.630	–1.1	3,123	3,164	–41
Waltham Forest	97.421	–1.129	–1.2	2,897	2,937	–39
Knowsley	73.138	–0.897	–1.2	2,605	2,642	–36
Kensington and Chelsea	34.193	–0.299	–0.9	3,058	3,093	–35

Table of results

Local Education Authority	*1 1996–97 Education SSA £ million*	*2 Cash difference £ million*	*3 Percentage difference in SSA Percentage*	*4 Actual 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*5 Adjusted 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*6 Change in 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*
Liverpool	209.232	–2.527	–1.2	2,573	2,608	–35
Wandsworth	86.304	–0.808	–0.9	3,090	3,124	–35
Birmingham	448.721	–4.720	–1.1	2,538	2,569	–30
Ealing	112.151	–0.912	–0.8	2,793	2,820	–26
Hounslow	94.807	–0.689	–0.7	2,759	2,782	–23
Newcastle upon Tyne	99.652	–0.764	–0.8	2,461	2,483	–22
Middlesbrough	61.491	–0.452	–0.7	2,449	2,470	–20
Wolverhampton	99.898	–0.721	–0.7	2,450	2,470	–20
Barking and Dagenham	69.879	–0.413	–0.6	2,661	2,679	–18
City of Kingston upon Hull	102.701	–0.659	–0.6	2,408	2,426	–18
Enfield	117.827	–0.664	–0.6	2,703	2,720	–17
Bradford	209.868	–1.217	–0.6	2,433	2,448	–16
Coventry	119.872	–0.663	–0.6	2,395	2,410	–15
Sandwell	118.096	–0.643	–0.5	2,392	2,407	–15
Salford	82.496	–0.413	–0.5	2,365	2,378	–14
Wirral	132.298	–0.645	–0.5	2,384	2,397	–13
Croydon	118.396	–0.493	–0.4	2,649	2,662	–13
Redbridge	98.258	–0.351	–0.4	2,657	2,668	–11
Gateshead	70.844	–0.246	–0.3	2,357	2,366	–9
City of Bristol	119.870	–0.386	–0.3	2,338	2,347	–9
Rochdale	82.736	–0.265	–0.3	2,356	2,364	–8
South Tyneside	59.030	–0.191	–0.3	2,343	2,352	–8
Walsall	108.588	–0.331	–0.3	2,342	2,350	–8
Redcar and Cleveland	59.590	–0.174	–0.3	2,377	2,385	–8
Hartlepool	37.013	–0.102	–0.3	2,337	2,344	–7
Barnet	117.029	–0.268	–0.2	2,598	2,605	–7
Sunderland	114.863	–0.296	–0.3	2,342	2,349	–7
Oldham	94.759	–0.241	–0.3	2,341	2,348	–7
Sheffield	170.970	–0.397	–0.2	2,331	2,337	–6
Merton	58.096	–0.089	–0.2	2,574	2,578	–5
Doncaster	119.680	–0.205	–0.2	2,394	2,399	–5
Hillingdon	93.797	–0.133	–0.1	2,584	2,588	–4
Calderdale	77.167	–0.106	–0.1	2,338	2,341	–4
Rotherham	102.425	–0.123	–0.1	2,325	2,328	–3
Sefton	106.847	–0.128	–0.1	2,296	2,299	–3
North Tyneside	68.757	–0.057	–0.1	2,293	2,295	–2
Bolton	100.891	–0.078	–0.1	2,283	2,285	–2
North East Lincolnshire	64.840	–0.045	–0.1	2,308	2,309	–2
Stockton on Tees	71.747	–0.008	0.0	2,310	2,310	0
St. Helens	66.604	–0.005	0.0	2,291	2,291	0
Nottinghamshire	365.135	–0.017	0.0	2,312	2,312	0
Harrow	72.990	0.007	0.0	2,552	2,551	0
Leeds	252.509	0.036	0.0	2,284	2,283	0
Sutton	67.782	0.016	0.0	2,554	2,553	1
City of London	0.759	0.000	0.0	2,866	2,864	1
Kirklees	141.523	0.095	0.1	2,305	2,303	2
Barnsley	76.867	0.059	0.1	2,277	2,275	2
Bedfordshire	220.156	0.207	0.1	2,416	2,413	3
Durham	216.644	0.219	0.1	2,330	2,327	3
Lancashire	510.448	0.766	0.1	2,289	2,285	4
Leicestershire	333.840	0.588	0.2	2,296	2,291	4
East Sussex	219.761	0.378	0.2	2,390	2,385	5
Bexley	88.646	0.157	0.2	2,502	2,497	5
Trafford	76.735	0.155	0.2	2,237	2,232	5
Wakefield	111.605	0.262	0.2	2,223	2,217	6
Isle of Wight Council	45.138	0.099	0.2	2,445	2,439	6
Kingston upon Thames	47.066	0.099	0.2	2,488	2,482	6
Wigan	110.133	0.292	0.3	2,218	2,212	7
Kent	581.733	1.431	0.2	2,405	2,399	7
Tameside	80.591	0.217	0.3	2,210	2,203	7
Dudley	104.158	0.292	0.3	2,209	2,202	7
Bury	61.635	0.184	0.3	2,208	2,201	7
Devon	345.862	1.070	0.3	2,305	2,297	8
Northamptonshire	222.270	0.815	0.4	2,269	2,260	9
Essex	566.981	1.994	0.4	2,418	2,409	9
Berkshire	282.308	1.009	0.4	2,414	2,405	10
Cheshire	348.970	1.392	0.4	2,238	2,228	10
Havering	87.183	0.314	0.4	2,473	2,463	10

Table of results

Local Education Authority	*1 1996–97 Education SSA £ million*	*2 Cash difference £ million*	*3 Percentage difference in SSA Percentage*	*4 Actual 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*5 Adjusted 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*	*6 Change in 5 to 18+ SSA per pupil £*
Bromley	103.845	0.389	0.4	2,450	2,440	10
Dorset	207.427	0.850	0.4	2,257	2,246	10
Derbyshire	319.922	1.328	0.4	2,245	2,235	10
Bath and North East Somerset	54.404	0.230	0.4	2,226	2,216	10
Cornwall	164.930	0.704	0.4	2,330	2,319	11
Cambridgeshire	237.278	1.042	0.4	2,301	2,289	11
Solihull	73.069	0.348	0.5	2,184	2,173	11
Hertfordshire	387.245	1.663	0.4	2,457	2,445	12
York	52.793	0.250	0.5	2,208	2,196	12
Buckinghamshire	252.855	1.155	0.5	2,405	2,393	12
Staffordshire	366.019	1.826	0.5	2,220	2,208	12
Northumberland	113.513	0.571	0.5	2,301	2,289	13
Norfolk	243.384	1.242	0.5	2,324	2,312	13
Stockport	89.804	0.478	0.5	2,156	2,143	13
Hampshire	525.153	2.700	0.5	2,308	2,295	13
North Lincolnshire	56.381	0.301	0.5	2,290	2,276	13
Cumbria	170.602	0.919	0.5	2,305	2,291	14
Gloucestershire	183.797	1.014	0.6	2,254	2,240	14
West Sussex	235.410	1.285	0.5	2,343	2,329	14
Warwickshire	164.025	0.951	0.6	2,237	2,223	14
Lincolnshire	213.026	1.197	0.6	2,329	2,314	14
Shropshire	145.332	0.830	0.6	2,279	2,265	14
Hereford and Worcester	229.005	1.404	0.6	2,251	2,235	15
Wiltshire	197.517	1.304	0.7	2,246	2,230	16
South Gloucestershire	78.677	0.547	0.7	2,152	2,136	16
Suffolk	217.470	1.476	0.7	2,243	2,227	17
North Somerset	58.642	0.416	0.7	2,203	2,186	17
Somerset	150.908	1.093	0.7	2,256	2,238	18
Oxfordshire	192.571	1.340	0.7	2,329	2,311	18
Richmond upon Thames	45.854	0.316	0.7	2,348	2,330	19
North Yorkshire	185.854	1.603	0.9	2,287	2,265	21
East Riding of Yorkshire	102.954	0.928	0.9	2,237	2,215	22
Surrey	307.474	2.515	0.8	2,393	2,371	22
Isles of Scilly	1.233	0.012	0.9	4,259	4,215	44
Total	17764.242	0.000	0.0	2,403	2,403	0
Inner London	1043.096	–15.404	–1.5	3,314	3,373	–59
Outer London	1824.526	–9.019	–0.5	2,680	2,695	–15
Metropolitan borough	4304.322	–16.400	–0.4	2,368	2,378	–10
Shires	9484.108	38.362	0.4	2,322	2,311	10
New Authorities	1106.975	2.449	0.2	2,293	2,288	6
Isles of Scilly	1.233	0.012	0.9	4,259	4,215	44

1. Columns 4 and 5 calculate SSA per 5 to 18+ pupil by dividing the sum of the primary, secondary and post-16 SSA sub-blocks by the sum of pupils aged 5 to 10, 11 to 15 and post-16, as defined in the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1996–97.
2. Column 4 sets out the actual level of SSA per pupil aged 5 to 18+ for 1996–97. Column 5 sets out what the level of SSA per pupil would have been without the change in methodology.
3. Column 6 ranks each authority in descending order of the change in SSA funding per pupil.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to lay before Parliament the proposed regulations which affect the payment of the disability living allowance mobility component to certain hospital in-patients. [32222]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Social Security (Disability Living Allowance and Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations 1996 were placed before the House today, 7 June. These regulations align the payment rules for the mobility component of disability living allowance—DLA—with those for the DLA care component, which is withdrawn after the first 28 days in hospital, 84 days for children.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a claimant for a backdated award will be advised that he should also make his claim for reduced earnings allowance at the same time; and what form the advice will take. [31259]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of reduced earnings allowance, payable under the industrial injuries scheme, is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Michael Clapham, dated 6 June 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if a claimant for a back dated award will be advised that he should also make his claim for Reduced Earning Allowance (REA) at the same time; and what form the advice will take.

I have assumed, as you have not specified the other benefit, that you are referring to a claim for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB).

Instructions to Benefit Agency staff provide for the issue of leaflet NI6, together with the relevant claim form, to a person who asks about claiming IIDB in respect of either an accident at work or an industrial disease.

Leaflet NI6, on page 9, gives information on how and when to claim REA and stresses that a person should not delay claiming REA until after the claim of Disablement Benefit is determined or they may lose benefit for any period more than three months before date of claim.

I am enclosing a copy of the leaflet NI6 for information. A revised version of this leaflet will be available shortly which will take account of the other REA legislative changes.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum cost per hour charged by N. M. Rothschild working on the contract to give advice on the privatisation of the coal industry; what is the total cost to date; what is the estimated final total cost; and if he will make a statement. [31489]

Mr. Page: Information relating to hourly rates paid to advisers on coal privatisation is commercially confidential. I can, however, confirm that, since 1991–92, the Department has paid N. M. Rothschild £8.956 million in professional fees. Further payments are expected to be small.

British Coal (Equal Pay)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will advise the British Coal Corporation to commit itself to negotiations on the colliery canteen workers' equal pay claim following the dismissal of their appeal to the House of Lords; and what steps he will take to bring the parties together; [31927]

(2) if he will advise the British Coal Corporation to make a special payment as part of the settlement of the canteen workers' equal pay claim for the undue delay in this case. [31928]

Mr. Page: These are matters for British Coal.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principle grades and the number and percentage of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30556]

Mr. John M. Taylor: On 1 April 1996, the DTI, excluding its executive agencies employed:

(a) (i) 3,235 men; (ii) 2,631 women.

(b) the following number of staff and women in its main grade levels:

Grade level	*Total number of staff*	*Women*	*Percentage of women in grade level*
G1	2	0	0
G2	9	0	0
G3	43	8	18.6
G4	7	3	42.9
G5	156	25	16.0
G6	121	29	24.0
G7	664	153	23.0
SEO	406	76	18.7
HEO	1,034	314	30.4
EO	1,121	531	47.3

(c) the following number of staff and women in its administration grade levels:

			Per cent.
AO	1,544	1,003	65.0
AA	759	490	64.6

The figures are provided on a headcount basis. They exclude casual staff and staff currently out of the Department, such as those on loan, career breaks.

I have asked the chief executives of this Department's agencies to respond to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 May 1996:

I am responding in relation to the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about male and female employees. The information requested is set out in the following tables:

Principal and specialist grades

Grade	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Percentage female*
Grade 3	1	0	1	0
Grade 5	2	1	3	33
Grade 6	5	0	5	0
Grade 7	6	2	8	25
Assistant comptroller	1	0	1	0
Superintending examiner	3	0	3	0
Principal examiner	16	2	18	11
Senior examiner	126	13	139	9
Examiner	41	3	44	7

Administrative support and secretarial grades

Grade	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Percentage female*
SEO	17	3	20	15
HEO	37	17	54	31
EO	95	75	170	44
AO	82	128	210	61
AA	45	65	110	59
Support grades	4	5	9	55
Personal secretaries	0	7	7	100
Typists	0	8	8	100

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to provide additional information on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory in reply to your question about the numbers and percentages of women employed on 1 April 1996.

For NWML, the information you request is summarised in the following table. This Agency employs a significant number of staff in the Scientific and the Professional and Technology grades and I have included these in the figures for the appropriate levels.

	Number of employees	*Number of women*	*Percentage women*
Chief executive	1	0	0
Grade 7	3	0	0
SEO level	8	1	12.5
HEO level	12	0	0
EO level	11	4	3.6
Administrative grades	13	12	92.3
Total	48	17	35.4

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 May 1996:

I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency, concerning your recent request to the President of the Board of Trade for information regarding employees within his department.

The attached table sets out the information you require for this Agency.

Companies House
Analysis—Employee by substantive grade and gender

	Male				*Female*			
	FTE	*Percentage*	*Headcount*	*Percentage*	*FTE*	*Percentage*	*Headcount*	*Percentage*
G4	1.0	100.0	1	100.0	—	—	—	—
G5	2.0	100.0	2	100.0	—	—	—	—
G7	7.0	65.7	7	65.7	3.7	34.3	4	37.6
SEO	12.0	92.3	12	92.3	1.0	7.7	1	7.7
SPTO	1.0	100.0	1	100.0	—	—	—	—
HEO	32.0	54.9	32	54.9	26.3	45.1	28	48.0
EO	63.5	57.4	64	57.9	47.1	42.6	56	50.6
AO	112.0	36.8	112	36.8	192.2	63.2	221	72.6
AA	54.4	44.6	55	45.0	67.8	55.4	79	64.6
SPS	—	—	—	—	1.0	100.0	1	100.0
PS	—	—	—	—	2.0	100.0	3	150.0
TM	—	—	—	—	1.0	100.0	1	100.0
TYP	—	—	—	—	6.0	100.0	8	133.3
SM2	—	—	—	—	1.0	100.0	1	100.0
SM3	4.0	42.1	4	42.1	5.5	57.9	6	63.2
SGB1	10.0	27.0	10	27.0	27.0	73.0	34	92.0
SGB2	45.1	22.7	52	26.2	153.7	77.3	230	115.7
Total	344.2	39.1	352.0	40.0	535.2	60.9	673.0	76.5

Figures excluded casuals. Figures included Career Breaks, Unpaid Maternity, Special Leave Without Pay, Secondments or on Loan, Staff Counselling Unit.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 7 June 1996:

Question: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will list (a) the number of (i) made and (ii) female employees, (b) the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the numbers and percentages of women employed at each of these grades and (c) the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the numbers and percentage of these staff that are women, in his Department on 1st April.

I have been asked to answer the questions you raised on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency.

(a) (i) 408 male employees

(ii) 110 female employees

(b)

Grade	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*
3	1	0	0
5	6	0	0
6	7	0	0
7	33	3	9.1
SEO and equivalent	59	4	6.8
HEO and equivalent	95	5	5.3
EO and equivalent	178	18	10.1
AO and equivalent	100	53	53
AA and equivalent	39	27	69

(c) Administrative grades

Total: 121

Female: 78

Percentage female: 64

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the numbers and grades of staff and the percentage of those who are female employed by the Insolvency Service as at 1 April 1996.

Grade	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Percentage female*
3	1	0	1	0
4	2	0	2	0
5	1	1	2	50
6	0	0	0	n/a
Inss Grade A	10	0	10	0
7	1	0	1	0
Inss Grade B	53	4	57	7
SEO	6	1	7	14
Inss Grade C	86	29	115	25
HEO	18	13	31	42

Grade	Male	Female	Total	Percentage female
HPTO	1	0	1	0
Inss Grade D	201	116	317	37
EO	63	61	124	49
PTO	1	0	1	0
Inss Grade E	44	35	79	44
AO	134	191	325	59
PS	0	13	13	100
SBG1	1	1	2	50
SM3	0	1	1	100
AA	59	84	143	59
SGB2	19	5	24	21
TYP	2	137	139	99
Div. totals	703	692	1,395	50

Source: DTI PERMIS Computer Records.

Staff included in the data comprise permanent staff, staff on loan from other Government Departments, staff seconded from the private sector (who have been allocated to the grades which reflect their salaries) and staff on paid maternity and sick leave.

The data does not include casual staff and those on short term appointments from agencies.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the employment effects in the United Kingdom of the introduction of a statutory national minimum wage set at *(a)* £3 per hour, *(b)* £3.50 per hour and *(c)* £4 per hour; and if he will make a statement. [31291]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Assuming a half restoration of differentials, a minimum wage set at the levels indicated would destroy in excess of 1 million jobs.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer from the introduction of a statutory national minimum wage of *(a)* £3 per hour, *(b)* £3.50 per hour and *(c)* £4 per hour; and if he will make a statement on the basis for the calculations. [31290]

Mr. Taylor: I have made no such assessment. However, it is clear that a minimum wage would destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs, which would have an adverse effect on the Exchequer.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures. [30766]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The figures for DTI, excluding its executive agencies, are set out below:

Total staff: 6,511

Registered disabled: 67

As a percentage of total staff: 1.03

The DTI also employs a number of staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Agency chief executives have been asked to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 30 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the number of registered disabled people employed by The Insolvency Service; and what percentage this is of the total figure.

As at 18 April 1996, 17 registered disabled persons were employed by The Insolvency Service, representing 1.24% of the total permanent staff in post.

In addition, there are 28 permanent members of staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register. This represents 2.05% of the total permanent staff in post.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 7 June 1996:

I am replying on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your question to the President of the Board of Trade about the percentage of disabled people employed.

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department; and what percentage this is of the total figures.

The Radiocommunications Agency has no registered disabled staff.

However, there are a number of staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 7 June 1996:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade, how many registered disabled people are employed by his Department and what percentage this if of the total figures. I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House.

There are 13 members of staff in Companies House who are registered disabled. This represents 1.2% of total staff.

There are, however, a further 20 members of staff who have identified themselves as disabled but are not registered disabled. This in total represents 3% of Companies House staff with disabilities.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 31 May 1996:

In the absence of the Comptroller General on official business I am replying for the Patent Office to your question on the number of registered disabled staff employed in the Office. The figures are:

Total number of staff as at 1 April 1996: 810

Number of registered disabled staff: 12

Disabled as percentage of total staff: 1.5%

The Office also has staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 31 May 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to provide information on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory in reply to your question about the number of disabled people employed by DTI.

This Agency has no registered disabled among its 51 employees.

TREASURY

Abortions

Sir David Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths were recorded as a result of abortion operations in England and Wales in 1995 [31317]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested is not yet available. The 1994 deaths following legal abortions will be presented in the Office for National Statistics annual reference volume "Abortion Statistics 1994 Series AB No. 21" due for publication in July 1996.

Drugs-related Deaths

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drugs-related deaths occurred in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands for each year since 1990. [31094]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The number of drugs-related deaths[1] to residents of Coventry district health authority and West Midlands regional health authority for each year since 1990 are shown in the table.

	Coventry	*West Midlands*
1990	5	30
1991	1	26
1992	2	29
1993	1	33
1994	1	25

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision codes 304 (drug dependence) and 305.2–305.9 (non-dependent abuse of drugs).

Deaths for 1992 and earlier years represent the number of deaths registered in each year, while deaths for 1993 and 1994 are deaths which occurred in these years. Also, new procedures for coding cause of death from 1993, and the absence of medical inquires, mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years. For most conditions, however, these effects are small. More details may be found in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys series DH2 for 1993, which was published in October 1995, a copy of which may be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Child Maintenance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the availability of tax relief on the cost of child maintenance for *(a)* married and *(b)* unmarried absent parents. [31202]

Mr. Jack: For maintenance arrangements entered into since 1988, tax relief is available only for payments made to a divorced or separated spouse for their own maintenance or the maintenance of a child living with them. The relief is subject to certain conditions and to a limit equal to the married couple's allowance.

EDS Computer Systems

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has revised his estimate of the savings to be made from his Department's information technology partnership with the firm EDS; and if he will make a statement. [31783]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury and its agencies do not have a technology partnership with the firm EDS.

CRESTCo

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he will take on the Director General of Fair Trading's report on CRESTCo. [32400]

Mrs. Angela Knight: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have now considered the Director General of Fair trading's report and we agree with his conclusion that the rules proposed by CRESTCo do not pose any significant competition problems. Accordingly, I have written to the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board to inform him that the Treasury gives the SIB leave to recognise CRESTCo as a recognised clearing house under the Financial Services Act 1986 and to approve CRESTCo as an operator of a relevant system under the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 3272.

HEALTH

Emergency Ambulance Calls

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average response time to a 999 call for an ambulance in London. [31321]

Mr. Horam: Average response time figures are not available centrally.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis need is assessed in response to 999 calls in London; and what system of prioritisation is employed. [31323]

Mr. Horam: All 999 calls are given equal priority at present.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications, broken down by gender, were received for the position of chairman of the new Doncaster health authority; how many candidates matched the criteria for selection; how many were considered for the shortlist; and what criteria were used for the final selection. [31495]

Mr. Malone: Following a regional advertising campaign and review of the regional database of candidates, two suitable candidates, both male, were identified. Both were interviewed and assessed against the job description for health authority chairmen, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the contracts for hospital and health services awarded under the competitive tendering process to date by Doncaster health authority, *(b)* the successful tenderers and *(c)* the value of the contracts. [31493]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for Doncaster health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Keith Jones, chairman of the authority for details.

Hospital Readmissions

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 April, *Official Report*, column *52*, when the information which the national health service executive is collecting about the number of patients aged between 16 and 64 years who have been *(a)* discharged within the previous 90 days and *(b)* re-admitted to hospital within 90 days of discharge will be available. [31938]

Mr. Bowis: The national health service executive will receive the first returns of this information, covering the period April to June 1996, some time after the end of that period.

Mental Health Challenge Fund

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities and their approved projects which have received grants from the mental health challenge fund. [31940]

Mr. Bowis: I announced details of the successful bids on 23 April.

Mental Illness

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State of Health what action he plans to take to ensure that, as the number of psychiatric nurses increases, a higher proportion focus on people with a severe mental illness. [31939]

Mr. Bowis: The national health service executive has made it clear that is the responsibility of health authorities, in partnership with providers of mental health services, to ensure that appropriate services are provided for people with a severe mental illness, based upon an assessment of local need.

Yorkshire RHA

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the research experience, *(b)* the job held prior to their final appointment with Yorkshire regional health authority and *(c)* the terms agreed on transfer from the regional health authority into other public employment for staff on senior managers pay point 9 or above, employed in the final year of its existence by the Yorkshire regional health authority. [30599]

Mr. Malone: Such data on employees of the former Yorkshire regional health authority are not available centrally.

Hospitals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals which have been opened in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [31219]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally in this form. For major national health service capital projects completed on site, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 20 March, *Official Report*, columns *247–48*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals which have been closed in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [31220]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Water Fluoridation

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many water companies have fluoridated their water since 1985. [31381]

Mr. Malone: In England, since 1985, eight water undertakers have operated fluoridation schemes.

General Practitioners

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of GPs at present per head of population *(a)* per health authority and *(b)* per family health services authority. [31380]

Mr. Malone: Family health services authorities ceased to exist on 1 April 1996. The number per health authority is not yet available.

Hepatitis B Vaccinations

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of *(a)* the extra costs of universal hepatitis B vaccinations; *(b)* the total cost of such a vaccination programme and *(c)* the cost of administering the vaccinations. [31371]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave her on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *294*, for information on costs.

Haemophilia

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in relation to haemophilia, what guidance he issues in respect of *(a)* a patient's consent to blood tests for hepatitis C and *(b)* a patient being told about positive results. [31372]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health issued general guidance in 1990 on consent for examination and treatment. Doctors treating patients with haemophilia will be aware of the risk of infection with hepatitis C in the case of patients treated with blood products before they began to be heat treated to destroy viruses in 1985. The majority of patients at risk have already been tested and advised of the results as part of the management of their condition.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is *(a)* the number of haemophiliacs and *(b)* the number who have been infected with hepatitis C; [31373]

(2) if he will list the percentage of partners of haemophiliacs who have been infected with hepatitis C; [31376]

(3) if he will list the percentage of children of haemophiliacs who are infected with hepatitis C. [31377]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the rate of hepatitis C infection in haemophiliacs in each European country. [31374]

Mr. Horam: We have no information about the rates of hepatitis C infection in haemophiliacs in other European countries.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the countries that have given compensation to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C. [31375]

Mr. Horam: No.

Breast Cancer

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the maximum waiting time for surgery for breast cancer. [31378]

Mr. Horam: No such guidance has been issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, the national health service breast screening programme recommends that 90 per cent. of women should be admitted within three weeks of being informed of the need for surgical treatment.

Community Pharmacy Bills

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the time scale for payment by his Department of bills submitted by community pharmacies; and what estimate he has made of the number of bills in each of the last five years which were paid after this period. [31379]

Mr. Malone: A payment representing approximately 80 per cent. of the amount due for dispensing prescriptions is made to community pharmacies on the first day of the month following that in which the correctly endorsed prescription is submitted for pricing. The remainder is paid on the first day of the following month. The costs to pharmacies of payment to this time scale are included in pharmacists' pay for providing NHS pharmaceutical services. Payments made beyond this time scale are not contemplated and information on any possible instances is therefore not collected centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the stage reached for the planned private finance initiatives for each of the proposed new hospitals in *(a)* Norfolk and Norwich, *(b)* Amersham, *(c)* Carlisle, *(d)* Swindon, *(e)* north Durham, *(f)* Bishop Auckland, *(g)* the Royal London hospital and *(h)* St. Thomas's hospital. [31876]

Mr. Horam: Full business cases for Norfolk and Norwich, Amersham, and Swindon have been approved, and the full business case for Carlisle is currently being considered for approval. Outline business cases for the remaining schemes have been approved. At north Durham and Bishop Auckland, the trusts concerned have identified preferred bidders and are preparing full business cases. At the Royal London hospital and St. Thomas's hospital, the trusts concerned have prepared shortlists from which they will identify their preferred bidder.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the terms of the proposed private finance initiatives for the proposed new hospitals in *(a)* Norfolk and Norwich, *(b)* Amersham, *(c)* Carlisle, *(d)* Swindon, *(e)* north Durham, *(f)* Bishop Auckland, *(g)* the Royal London hospital and *(h)* St. Thomas's hospital; [31880]

(2) what is the length of repayment periods for the proposed private finance initiatives for the proposed new hospitals in *(a)* Norfolk and Norwich, *(b)* Amersham, *(c)* Carlisle, *(d)* Swindon, *(e)* north Durham and *(f)* Bishop Auckland; [31879]

(3) what is the repayment period for the proposed private finance initiatives for the Royal London hospital and St. Thomas's hospital. [31877]

Mr. Horam: The contract terms in these private finance initiative projects are being negotiated between the trusts and their private sector partners. A privately financed solution is acceptable only if it offers better value for money overall than a publicly funded alternative.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is being sought through the private finance initiative for the proposed new hospitals in *(a)* Norfolk and Norwich, *(b)* Amersham, *(c)* Carlisle, *(d)* Swindon, *(e)* north Durham, *(f)* Bishop Auckland, *(g)* the Royal London hospital and *(h)* St. Thomas's hospital. [31878]

Mr. Horam: The capital values of private finance initiative schemes approved in the full business cases for the following hospitals are:

	£ million
Norfolk and Norwich	170
South Buckinghamshire NHS trust, which includes:	
Amersham general hospital	38
Swindon	90

The other hospitals mentioned in the question are in the process of negotiation with private sector partners or potential private sector partners and the total value of any proposed scheme is part of the negotiating process.

Infections (Schools)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is pursuing to combat head lice infestation in schools. [31621]

Mr. Horam: The Department launched an information campaign on 22 April. This was ably assisted by the voluntary organisation Community Hygiene Concern—CHC—which provides support and advice to families on dealing with this problem. CHC currently receives grant aid from the Department of £75,000 over three years.

Our campaign leaflet, "The Prevention and Treatment of Head Lice" gives advice to parents and teachers on the options available. The campaign has proved popular with community health professionals, including those in the school health service. In excess of 750,000 leaflets have been distributed.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the provision of paediatric intensive care beds per head in *(a)* Yorkshire and *(b)* England; [31989]

(2) what is the number of paediatric intensive care beds per capita in each of the regional health authorities in England. [31899]

Mr. Horam: A recent survey of dedicated general and specialist paediatric intensive care beds open in England, by regional health authority, indicates current bed distribution relative to resident child populations as shown

in the table. This does not take account of intensive care for children provided in adult intensive care units or of care provided outside the region in question. A report by the chief executive of the national health service executive on paediatric intensive care was published last month, copies of which are available in the Library. The report describes plans to develop this service further, and to provide additional beds.

Region	*Beds open: April 1996*	*Population (0 to 16 years)*[1]	*Bed per capita ratio*
Northern and Yorkshire	28	1,463,395	1:52,264
Anglia and Oxford	8	1,163,777	1:145,472
North Thames	43	1,474,719	1:34,296
South Thames	29	1,404,969	1:48,447
South and West	13	1,353,775	1:104,136
North West	37	1,490,184	1:40,275
Trent	21	1,023,528	1:48,739
West Midlands	17	1,181,847	1:69,520
England total	196	10,556,194	1:53,858

[1] *Source*: Office for National Statistics (1994 estimate).

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sharks

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been taken over the last five years to assess the stock size of the basking shark in United Kingdom waters; and what the stock size is currently estimated to be. [31329]

Mr. Baldry: Between 1987 and 1992, the basking shark was the subject of a survey programme carried out by the Marine Conservation Society. The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department monitored the very limited Scottish basking shark fishery while it was in operation, and collated data from other nations. However, no estimates of basking shark stock size were made, due in part to their erratic and highly variable appearances off western European coasts.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) who is the legally responsible attendant for livestock on vehicles carried by sea between Dover and Dunkirk when the driver of the vehicle is travelling on an alternative sea route; [31774]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that vehicles carrying livestock between Dover and Dunkirk keep within their journey plans, in the event that they must wait at Dunkirk for absent drivers travelling on other sea routes. [31775]

Mrs. Browning: The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994, as amended, requires every person in charge of any animal transport undertaking that transports animals in the course of business or trade to ensure that, when animals are unaccompanied, the consignee is prepared to receive them and, to ensure that the animals are transported without delay to their place of destination.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many communications he received in 1995 regarding the export of live farm animals; and how many were from hon. Members. [31786]

Mrs. Browning: In 1995, the Ministry received 19,695 communications regarding the export of live farm animals, of which 1,966 were from hon. Members.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects *(a)* interim judgment and *(b)* full judgment in the case on BSE which he is placing before the European Court of Justice. [31828]

Mrs. Browning: The United Kingdom's challenge to the legality of the export ban was placed before the European Court of Justice on 24 May. We have not yet been given a date for the hearing on the application for an interim injunction, but expect this to take place in about three to four weeks, with the ECJ issuing its interim judgment within a further week. Given the usual timetable for this type of case, we expect final judgment to take about 18 months.

SCOTLAND

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons he changed the terms of previous Scottish Office guidance issued to Scottish local authorities relating to the compulsory competitive tendering of council services under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1986. [30537]

Mr. Kynoch: The early reintroduction of compulsory competitive tendering of services under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 is designed to ensure value for money for council tax payers. The decision follows complaints that some councils have failed to obtain value for money when existing arrangements expire, notwithstanding a warning issued on 15 November 1995 that the Government would reconsider the length of the CCT moratorium if authorities did not approach the suspension of CCT in a constructive manner.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the value of services that will be subject to the competitive tendering exercise under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and how many jobs in Scottish councils will be covered by these contractual arrangements. [30595]

Mr. Kynoch: Precise information is not available. However, we estimate that in 1994–95 local authorities were carrying out in-house work valued at about £560 million and employing 20,000 following competitive tendering exercises under the 1980 Act.

The extent to which this work will be subject to a competitive tendering exercise for re-introduction on 1 January will depend on when the present arrangements expire.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to reverse his recent change of guidance to Scottish local authorities, issued on 13 May, relating to the compulsory competitive tendering of services under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and to extend the deadline for this exercise to 1 July. [30540]

Mr. Kynoch: No.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to publish information on the private finance initiative in Scotland. [32461]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am publishing today a document entitled "Private Finance and Public Services: A Partnership for Scotland". It summarises guidance on the preparation of private finance initiative projects and lists sources of advice for those sponsoring projects in Scotland. It also describes the progress and potential of the initiative in Scotland and includes a list of actual and potential projects. I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what valuation was put on the housing stock of each of Scotland's development corporations by the appropriate district valuer; and when these valuations were made. [30543]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is set out in the table.

Corporation	*District valuer's valuation £ million*	*Date*
Glenrothes	47.673	31 March 1994
East Kilbride	57.277	30 November 1993
Cumbernauld	29.835	31 March 1995
Livingston	42.133	8 August 1995
Irvine	33.043	17 August 1995

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the organisations that were allowed to bid for the housing stock of each development corporation in Scotland, the valuations put on the housing stock of each corporation by each bidder, the names of the successful bidders, the number of properties successfully bid for in each case and the amounts that each organisation paid for these properties. [30551]

Mr. Kynoch: The guidance issued by the Scottish Office on the disposal of tenanted housing owned by the new town development corporations provided that local authorities, registered housing associations or approved landlords could bid for the stock. The table shows in column 2 the organisations that submitted bids, in column 3 the number of areas of each town for which each organisation submitted bids and in column 4 the total of the cash bids made by each organisation. The successful bidders for the tenanted stock in Glenrothes and East Kilbride, the new towns where disposal has been completed, were Kirkcaldy district council, which paid £51.682 million for 4,783 houses, and East Kilbride district council, which paid £56.2 million for 7,834 houses. The purchase prices are lower than the cash bids as the number of tenanted houses fell, mainly due to sales to tenants, in the period between submission of the bids and completion of the sale.

Corporation (1)	*Bidders* (2)	*Number of areas bid for* (3)	*Cash bids £ million* (4)
Glenrothes	Kirkcaldy District Council	15	53.619
	Hillcrestt Housing Association	4	15.340
	Kingdom Housing Association	3	4.843
(15 areas)[1]	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	13	37.236
	Collydean Community Housing Association	1	5.800
	The Munro Trust	15	45.798
East Kilbride	East Kilbride District Council	10	63.582
(10 areas)	The Munro Trust	10	44.173
Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld and Kilsyth District Council	5	20.108
(5 areas)	Abronhill Housing Association	1	5.238
Livingston	West Lothian District Council	10	40.026
(10 areas)	Almond Housing Association	3	14.482
	Castle Rock Housing Association	3	10.975
	Edinvar Housing Association	3	10.159
	Bield Housing Association	1	0.825
	Viewpoint Housing Association	1	0.860
Irvine	Cunninghame District Council	5	32.375
(5 areas)	Irvine Housing Association	5	22.777

[1] Each Corporation divided the housing stock into discrete geographical areas for the purposes of disposal of the tenanted stock. Bidders could bid for any number or all of the areas.

Inverclyde Enterprise Zone

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many companies have been recruited to designated sites by Locate in Scotland during the existence of the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement. [30181]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* Four companies operating from sites within the Inverclyde enterprise zone have been attracted to those sites by Locate in Scotland since the zone was established.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the numbers and percentages of women employed at each of these grades and *(c)* the number of staff employed at administrative grades and the number and percentage of these staff who are women in his Department on 1 April. [30553]

Mr. Norris: The answer, as recorded in the Department's two computerised personnel records systems, is in the tables.

(a) Total staff in the Department of Transport as at 1st April 1996 broken down by gender

	Number
Females	5,240
Males	6,552
Total	11,792

(b) Number of staff at each grade level as at 1st April 1996 (including what percentage are female)

Grade level	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Percentage who are female*
Grade 1	1	0	1	0
Grade 2	4	0	4	0
Grade 3	15	3	18	16.66
Grade 4	13	0	13	0
Grade 5	77	12	89	13.48
Grade 6	94	4	98	4.08
Grade 7	503	60	563	10.66
SEO	659	75	734	10.22
HEO	784	264	1,048	25.19
EO	2,217	723	2,940	24.59
AO	1,325	1,985	3,310	59.97
AA	381	1,746	2,127	82.08
Others	479	368	847	43.45
Total	6,552	5,240	11,792	44.44

(c) Number of administrative staff at each grade level as at 1 April 1996 (including what percentage are female)

Grade level	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Percentage who are female*
Grade 1	1	0	1	0
Grade 2	4	0	4	0
Grade 3	12	3	15	20
Grade 4	4	0	4	0
Grade 5	49	8	57	14.04
Grade 6	23	3	26	11.54
Grade 7	187	44	231	19.04
SEO	175	61	236	25.85
HEO	424	239	663	36.04
EO	553	574	1,127	50.93
AO	814	1,807	2,621	68.94
AA	341	1,417	1,758	80.60
Others	6	0	6	0
Total	2,593	4,156	6,749	61.58

Highways Agency

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the Highways Agency's 1996–97 proposed expenditure in each of the regions for *(a)* new network enhancement schemes, *(b)* new motorway communications projects and *(c)* new local safety schemes. [31310]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 7 June 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he will list the Highways Agency's 1996–97 proposed expenditure in each of the regions for (a) new network enhancement schemes (b) new motorway communication projects and (c) new local safety schemes.

The Highways Agency proposed to spend during 1996–97 the amounts (in £) set out below in each of its four regions on new network enhancement schemes, new motorway communication projects and new local safety schemes respectively:

	Southern	*London*	*Midland*	*Northern*
Network enhancements	0	290,000	400,000	0
Communications[1]	1,753,000	395,000	135,000	500,000
Safety schemes	450,000	225,000	550,000	500,000

[1] In addition to these amounts 973,000 will be spent on new communications projects which will be managed centrally by the HA.

All these sums will be in addition to expenditure on schemes which began before the start of the current financial year, but will incur further expenditure during it.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *546*, (1) how much his Department estimated it would have cost to provide the information requested; [31457]

(2) how much his Department estimated it would have cost to provide the information requested. [31448]

Mr. Norris: More than £450, the current threshold above which answers are deemed to incur disproportionate cost.

Road Accidents

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many serious injuries, deaths or other appropriate and broadly comparable indicators of road accidents occur annually per unit of vehicle/miles travelled in each member state of the Europe Union; and what studies have been made of variations. [32016]

Mr. Norris: International comparisons of road accident data are difficult because of national difference in definition, reporting procedures, reporting rates of both the public and collecting authorities, the legal requirement to report injury accidents and different levels of enforcement of road safety legislation. The table, which

includes European member states, presents available data which are regarded as reasonably comparable between the countries shown. Such comparisons provide a benchmark for a wide variety of more detailed studies of international variation in road accident casualties and rates or reporting procedures.

Road user fatalities, OECD member states, 1994[1]

	Road deaths per 100,000 population	*Road deaths per 10,000 motor vehicles*	*Road deaths per billion vehicle km*
United Kingdom	6.5	—	8.8
Great Britain	6.4	1.5	8.7
Austria	16.7	3.1	21.0
Belgium	16.8	3.4	—
Denmark	10.5	2.6	13.6
Finland	9.5	2.2	11.5
France	15.6	3.2	18.5
Germany	12.1	2.1	16.6
Germany (East)	19.3	4.0	32.0
Germany (West)	10.3	1.7	13.7
Greece	20.2	6.2	—
Ireland	11.4	3.4	14.8
Italy	12.6	2.0	—
Luxembourg	18.5	2.4	—
Netherlands	8.5	1.9	12.4
Portugal	28.7	5.4	—
Spain	14.4	3.1	—
Sweden	6.7	1.4	—
Hungary	15.2	6.1	—
Iceland	6.4	1.3	9.1
Norway	6.5	1.3	—
Switzerland	9.7	1.7	11.3
Turkey	14.0	—	—
Australia	11.1	1.9	—
Canada	12.4	2.0	—
Japan	10.2	1.8	18.7
New Zealand	16.5	2.5	—
USA	15.8	2.1	10.7

[1] Figures in bold are for 1993.

Hackney Carriage Licences

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has, following the Smith and Kelly *v.* Wirral metropolitan borough council decision, for re-instating the rights of courts to override the refusal of councils to grant hackney carriage licences. [31351]

Mr. Norris: As I do not share the hon. Member's view of the implication of this decision, I have no plans of the sort he suggests.

Railtrack Share Flotation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost to public funds of Railtrack's celebration of its share flotation held at the natural history museum; and if he will make a statement. [31430]

Mr. Watts: None.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Railtrack is planning to spend on the remedial works identified by the Health and Safety Executive's recent report on the Forth rail bridge; what projects have been delayed because of the emergency nature of the repairs to the Forth rail bridge; and what expenditure Railtrack is planning on the Forth rail bridge over the next three financial years. [31474]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are taken to ensure that vessels carrying vehicles containing livestock between Dover and Dunkirk do not exceed the number of passengers a cargo ship is licensed to carry. [31773]

Mr. Norris: All ships trading internationally to and from UK ports are subject to inspection by the Marine Safety Agency to ensure that they comply with the appropriate standards, including the requirement that any ship carrying more than 12 passengers must have a passenger safety certificate.

Performance Bonds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *38*, what was the sum required for each of the bonds; and what was the size of the company to which each related. [31231]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* In one case, the value of the bond was £2.5 million in respect of a contract with a tender value of approximately £25 million awarded to a company with a turnover for a year in which the bond was placed of around £350 million.

In the second case, the value of the bond was £4.75 million in respect of a group of contracts with total value of approximately £38 million awarded to a company whose turnover was around £95 million for the year in which the bond was placed.

In neither case was it ultimately necessary to call on the bonds protection, though such additional protection was considered prudent to protect the Department as a client.

WALES

Archive Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the provisions of section 60 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 on archive services in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [31482]

Mr. Hague: I have received several representations from hon. Members and others. Section 60 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 requires councils to consult with Ministers about the schemes which they prepare under that section and to have regard to ministerial advice. It imposes no onus on myself or

colleagues to monitor the implementation or operation of the schemes, but using reserve powers in sections 32 to 34 of the Act I could intervene where appropriate. I trust that it will not prove necessary to use those powers.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

AIDS Conference

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if representatives from his Department will be attending the 11th international conference on AIDS in Vancouver in July. [31018]

Mr. Hanley: The Overseas Development Administration will be funding the attendance of a researcher in HIV/AIDS at this meeting. The ODA is also providing grants for five scholars from developing countries to enable them to attend.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 278**

SESSION 1995–96

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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